

A BIOGRAPHY OF LYDIA MARIA CHILD

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## INTRODUCTION

A hundred years ago the names of the American abolitionists were prominently before the public. Of the literary figures who espoused this cause only the chief names have survived the mortality of the passing century. The cause of abolition was, however, in a large measure forwarded by many whose names now appear only in the obscure footnotes of our literary history.

One such neglected writer was Lydia Maria Child, born on February 11, 1802, in Medford, Massachusetts. Her contemporary fame was considerable, for her early novels approached best seller proportions. Having attained such fame, she turned from it to dedicate her pen to the cause of the slave. As one of the pioneer writers in defense of abolition, she knowingly renounced a literary position which gave her financial returns of which she had need. Her decision estranged her from a large portion of her readers and brought down upon her the indignation of an incensed public. Such was her character that she continued to work for this unpopular cause, strengthened in the conviction that it was just.

Modest and unassuming, Maria Child resented any intrusion upon her privacy. Happily married and content in the seclusion of her modest home in the quiet village of Wayland in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, she almost rudely rebuffed the advances of those who would make her known to the public. She felt that "no one had a right" to

inquire into her personal life and, consequently, no biography was written during her lifetime. The most factual account of her accomplishments was written as a funeral oration by her dear friend and close associate in abolitionist activities, John Greenleaf Whittier.

Only two likenesses of Maria Child exist. One is a painting made at the height of her fame and now hung in the Medford Historical Society. Due to well-meaning restoration it can no longer be considered an authentic likeness. The other is a photograph in the Wayland Public Library, taken in later life when she had become somewhat obese. There is in this photograph little of conventional beauty. Rather it portrays a vigorous resolute woman who regards the world with kindly eyes. Her bonnet, plain dress and simple white collar bespeak a disregard for changes of fashion.

In her later years Maria Child developed certain personal idiosyncracies, but she remained in full command of her faculties to the end. Her thoughts and deeds were always for those less fortunate. To assist those oppressed by society or innate weakness of character she gave fully of her time and energies. Her humanitarian spirit served with equal vigor the Negro slave oppressed by a nation and the town drunkard, a victim of his own intemperance.

Although but a minor figure in the history of the American novel, Maria Child touched many facets of the life of her day. Transcendentalism, humanitarian reform and abolition in greater or lesser degree influenced her writing. Many of the great and the near great of the

nineteenth century were her friends. The contemporary popularity of her fiction cannot be denied nor can the influence of her non-fictional writings.

Maria Child died in 1880. Already somewhat outmoded, her novels were read only by those who remembered her as a friend. Finally the generation that looked eagerly forward to the publication of her books passed away. Following generations, schooled in another style, found her characters tedious and her melodrama rather humorous. Her novels will never again attain their contemporary success, but the strong spirit of humanitarian reform which permeated all her writings may justify this attempt to review her life and accomplishments.

## CHAPTER I

### HERITAGE AND YOUTH

Although late in life Maria Child professed that she "never took the slightest interest in the genealogy of her family on either side"<sup>1</sup> to the extent of being unaware of the given names of her grandfathers, she was the descendant of New England forebears who had taken part in the struggle for national independence.

In 1636 the first of her line of the Francis family, one Richard Francis, arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts from Norfolk, England. Although said to have been of the same stock as the Francises of Francis Court who afterward succeeded to the estate of Combe Florey, Richard Francis came to America as an indentured servant and served until he was declared "Freeman" in 1640. In 1638 he married Alice Wilcox of Cambridge. He died in Cambridge at the age of eighty-one years "or thereabout" according to his stone, reset and deepened in the old burial ground.<sup>2</sup> John, the third of the seven children of this couple, was born in Medford in 1650. He in turn married Lydia Cooper. This family was given the first seat in the church, an honor which designated them as important members of the community. Nathaniel, their second son, was born in 1692. A weaver by trade, he married Sarah, whose family name is undiscovered. They lived at "Mentomy," now called Arlington. Of their four sons, Benjamin, born in 1734, was an ardent

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<sup>1</sup>C.H. Dall, "Lydia Maria Child and Mary Russell Mitford," Unitarian Review, XIX, 520

<sup>2</sup>Record of the Old Burial Ground, Cambridge, Massachusetts

"liberty man" and an excellent marksman. He married Lydia Convers, orphan niece of Dr. Convers of Woburn, by whom he had ten children. Despite this large family the first guns of the Revolutionary War found him in the midst of the fight.<sup>1</sup> He is said to have killed five men at Concord Bridge. He served four years and finally returned to find his family destitute. Since no cloth was being imported into the new country, there was ample opportunity for him to return to his trade of weaver. The fourth son of this marriage was Convers,<sup>2</sup> born in 1766.<sup>3</sup> At the age of twenty-two he married Susannah Rand, "of a Charlestown family who had been driven from their home by the flames of the battle of Bunker Hill, with almost entire loss of property."<sup>4</sup> He was a man of little formal education who had been apprenticed to a baker in 1780 and with whom he remained until 1787. In 1800 he moved to Medford. With him he brought the first brick oven ever to be used in the town. With this equipment he made the "Medford Cracker," a commodity which became popular throughout the states and Europe. Orders came from as far distant as Russia. Such was the industry of this modest

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<sup>1</sup>Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War. Compilation from the Archives. "Francis, Benjamin, Medford, Private, Lieutenant Caleb Brook's (late Captain Isaac Hall's) company, 37th regiment. Company return dated, Camp Prospect Hill, October 6, 1775; also, order for bounty coat or its equivalent in money dated Prospect Hill, December 29, 1775." p.6

<sup>2</sup>Whittier gives his name as David, but this is incorrect. David was son of Stephen Francis and the father of the well-known publisher, who encouraged Lydia Francis to publish her Juvenile Miscellany when he was a member of the firm of Munroe and Francis.

<sup>3</sup>Convers Francis, son of Benjamin, born July 14, 1766. Vital Records of Medford, Massachusetts to the Year 1850, p. 59

<sup>4</sup>Anna D. Hallowell, "Lydia Maria Child," The Medford Historical Register, III, 96

man that in 1816, at the age of fifty he retired with a fortune of fifty thousand dollars, a more than considerable amount in the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

This family had six children.<sup>2</sup> Convers Francis, fifth child of the union, described his parents. Of his mother this son wrote affectionately, "She had a simple, loving heart, and a spirit busy in doing good." Her great love of flowers led her to teach him, when but a mere lad, to help her in the garden which she cherished. Of his father Convers Francis wrote:

He was the most intensely industrious man, I think, that I ever knew. He devoted himself to his work with an eagerness and an unsparing exertion of strength which used to seem to me prodigious. He was sturdy, sometimes rough, but kind and faithful. He had good common-sense, and a well-balanced judgment; his education had been very scanty, but he was always fond of reading, and picked up considerable information. He was a great lover of right and freedom. The sound of the old Revolution, in which his father was a soldier, was still in his ears, and he detested slavery, with all its apologists and in all its forms.<sup>3</sup>

It was a large family, having besides the children and parents, the Revolutionary hero who was their grandfather and a blind uncle, James, who had to be cared for. This uncle changed his religious convictions frequently and was avid for information on each religion. His affliction made it necessary that the children read to him.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 96

<sup>2</sup>James S., June 12, 1789; Lydia, February 11, 1802; Mary Rand, January 20, 1792; Polly Rand, May 29, 1793; Susannah, October 7, 1790. Vital Records of Medford, Massachusetts to the Year 1850, p. 60. A child, 1799 Private Record from ledger and day-books of Gov. John Brooks, M.D. 1787-1816 now owned by Daniel N. Howard of Medford. Also a day book 1808-1809 now in possession of Edward W. Mitchell of Medford.

<sup>3</sup>John Weiss, Discourse Occasioned by the Death of Convers Francis, D.D., p. 66

In 1802 Lydia Maria, the sixth and last child, was born to Convers and Susannah Francis.

Fine animal spirit, delight in living, tireless activity and energy, were part of her abounding health. She said of herself that she was 'born before nerves came into fashion.' She was the youngest of five living children, bright, impulsive, warm-hearted, and self-willed.<sup>1</sup>

She inherited a complex heredity. From her "gentle" mother, whose influence was to be so early withdrawn, she may have inherited her love of nature and an awe of its wonders. From her "opinionated" father may have come that determination which led her, once she had espoused the unpopular cause of the slave, to go on irresistibly until inevitable victory came to her cause.

Christened by Doctor Osgood as Lydia Maria,<sup>2</sup> she was called Maria by the family. Her earliest years were spent in the company of her brother, Convers, seven years her elder. Much of their time was spent in reading although the library in the home was meager. "An odd volume of Cowley, Orton's Exposition of the Old Testament, Forbe's Family Book, some histories of England and of the Revolution, and Watt's Improvement of the Mind formed the contents of the little book case."<sup>3</sup> Added to this was a small collection belonging to Convers Francis, many volumes of which were beyond his sister's childish understanding. Here began that questioning of and reliance upon her brother which was to characterize her throughout life.

<sup>1</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 96

<sup>2</sup>Vital Records of Medford, Massachusetts to the Year 1850 'took when baptized, the name of Lydia Maria.' p. 60

<sup>3</sup>Weiss, op. cit., p. 16

'Convers,' she asked, 'What does Shakespeare mean by this? What does Milton mean by that?' Sometimes he was reguish, and enjoyed a little mystification. Thus he made her believe that the 'Raven down of darkness' was the fur of a black cat that sparkled because it was stroked the wrong way; though why the word down should be used for fur continued secretly to puzzle her.<sup>1</sup>

This affection which began in early childhood continued until death. To this brother his sister wrote in 1838, "To your early influence, by conversation, letters, and example, I owe it that my busy energies took a literary direction at all."<sup>2</sup> Twenty years later her devotion remained undiminished. In 1858 she wrote:

I think you have done a vast amount of good in many ways. Your conversation always tends to enlarge and liberalize the minds with which you come in contact; more than a dozen times I have heard people speak of the good your sympathizing words have done them in times of affliction; and for myself, I can say most truly before God that I consider such intellectual culture as I have mainly attributable to your influence; and most sincerely can I say, moreover, that up to this present hour I prize a chance for communion with your mind more than I do with any other person I know.<sup>3</sup>

Of this beloved sister Convers Francis wrote, "A dear, blessed sister has she been to me; would that I had been half as good a brother to her!"<sup>4</sup>

Their early education was identical. Both attended a "dame school" run by Elizabeth Francis, who was no kin. The school was kept in a dingy room in the home of this rather eccentric spinster known as "Ma'am"

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 17

<sup>2</sup>Letters of Lydia Maria Child, ed. Harriet Sewall, p. 29 (hereafter noted as Letters)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 93

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Weiss, op. cit., p. 17



Betty by the townfolks. She chewed a great deal of tobacco yet seems to have been abnormally shy, for all her life she never forgot the calamity of Dr. Brooks' having seen her drinking water from the spout of her kettle. Both had further educational opportunities in the village school under the direction of Dr. Hosmer.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the inequality of opportunity for an education which existed in the early nineteenth century that while Convers Francis would have the opportunity to attend Harvard College and later become its Parkman professor of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care,<sup>2</sup> his sister had to make her way in life with only that education which she was able to acquire by her own efforts.

Separation was not to lessen the close bond between these most devoted members of a family. Letters, and personal contact when possible, kept this affection alive. Maria Francis was but twelve years of age when, on May 7, 1814,<sup>3</sup> her mother died. This calamity was followed by another which was to mean a cruel separation. Mary Rand Francis, "a well-poised character, and of rare judgment,"<sup>4</sup> had taken over the housekeeping and the place of a mother to her more impulsive sister, whose elder she was by eight years. On September 1, 1814 Mary married Warren Preston, a lawyer of standing in Norridgewock, the shiretown of Somerset County in Maine. "Maria was inconsolable, refused to be present at the wedding ceremony, and taking her kitten, for a sympathetic

<sup>1</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 96 states that Lydia Francis attended an academy operated by Dr. Hosmer. It has not been possible to identify Dr. Hosmer further.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Francis, Francis Family, p. 190

<sup>3</sup>Old Burying Ground, Medford, "Mrs. Susannah, wife of Mr. Convers Francis, died May 7, 1914."

<sup>4</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 97

companion, disappeared up the lane, until all was over."<sup>1</sup> Convers was now a student at Harvard and spent his free months teaching school in Wilmington.<sup>2</sup> Thus Maria was left with only her ever-busy father to take care of her. "Alarmed at her increasing fondness for books,"<sup>3</sup> her father decided to send her on a long, slow stage coach journey to join the household of her sister Mary in the Kennebec region of Maine.

This area:

was largely settled by members of cultivated Massachusetts families, graduates of Harvard and other universities, and professional men seeking new fields of occupation and interest. The court convened in Norridgewock. This brought judges and lawyers with their families to the town, from various parts of the State, and formed a center of intelligence and refinement, in which Judge Preston's home was prominent.<sup>4</sup>

But thirty-nine years had passed since Benedict Arnold, then a brilliant and energetic officer from Connecticut, had marched through Norridgewock on his incredible journey through the wilds of Maine on an ill-fated expedition against Canada. This town was a new settlement, for old Norridgewock, site of the present town of Madison, had been abandoned after the dreadful day in 1724 when British troops from New England had slaughtered every man, woman and child in the little Abenaki village. This atrocity is today commemorated by a weather-beaten obelisk.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 97

<sup>2</sup>Weiss, op. cit., p. 18

<sup>3</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 97

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 97 Warren Preston listed as town moderator in 1814, "The First Unitarian Society and Church in Norridgewock was organized May 28, 1825 with Hon. Warren Preston, Chairman." J. W. Hanson, History of Norridgewock.

Mrs. Preston trained her sister well in those domestic accomplishments which are performed with such dexterity by the New England housewife. Decorative handwork was not neglected, for there is still in existence an exquisite infant's gown sewed and embroidered with remarkable skill by Maria when in her teens. She never lost this ability to work with her hands, for late in life she contributed a most artistic patch work quilt to a money-raising activity of the Abolitionists.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately the more practical aspects of household care were included in her education, for until late in life she employed no domestic help, but with all her voluminous writing cared for her home with her own hands.

Time was devoted to intellectual pursuits, for at the age of fifteen she was reading Milton and Homer. She wrote to Convers, still her intellectual mentor, a comparison between the styles of these authors. At this early age she expressed her strong objection to Milton's assertion of the superiority of the male. This revolt was to characterize her thinking throughout her life. Though not a rabid woman's rights advocate, she always resented the assumption of the inferiority of women.

While visiting Dr. Brown in Skowhegan,<sup>2</sup> she first read Scott. Guy Rannering and Waverly interested her deeply.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>These articles are on display at the Medford Historical Society, under the supervision of Mrs. Emma Gray-Francis, Curator Emeritus.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. vi

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 3

From Scott, Maria Francis learned the contrast between life and fiction. "In life," she wrote, "I am aware that gentleness and modesty form the distinguished ornaments of our sex. But in description they cannot captivate the imagination, nor rivet the attention."<sup>1</sup> This early conclusion probably exerted an influence over her fiction. Her heroines from Mary Conant in her first novel, Hoboken, to the Royal sisters in her final one, A Romance of the Republic, are far from the modest and gentle maidens of the Nineteenth Century. There is an uncontrolled melodrama about their actions which may be attributed to this early desire to "rivet the attention."

After many years she recalled an important incident which occurred during her stay in Maine. On seeing Indians encamped in the then rural area of Hoboken, she engaged them in pleasant conversation when

a fat little papoose, round as a tub, with eyes like black beads, attracted my attention by the comical awkwardness of its tumbling movements. I entered into conversation with the parents, and found they belonged to the remnant of the Penobscot tribe. This, as Scott says was, 'picking up a dropped stitch' in the adventure of my life. 'Ah,' said I, 'I once ate supper with your tribe in a hemlock forest, on the shores of the Kennebec. Is the old chief, Captain Neptune, yet alive?' They almost clapped their hands with delight, to find one who remembered Captain Neptune. I inquired for Etalexis, his nephew, and this was to them another familiar word, which it gave them joy to hear. Long forgotten scenes were restored to memory, and the images of early youth stood distinctly before me. I seemed to see old Neptune and his handsome nephew, a tall athletic youth, of most graceful proportions. I always used to think of Etalexis, when I read of Benjamin West's exclamation the first time he saw the Apollo Belvidere: 'My God! How like a young Mohawk warrior!' But for years I had not

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. vi

thought of the majestic young Indian, until the meeting in Hoboken again brought him to my mind. I seemed to see him as I saw him last - the very dandy of his tribe - with a broad band of shining brass about his hat, a circle of silver on his breast, tied with scarlet ribbons, and a long belt of curiously wrought wampum hanging to his feet.<sup>1</sup>

When her first novel which dealt with an Indian theme brought fame to Maria Francis, it was assumed that her experience with the Indian was purely imaginary, yet the recent memory of the warrior Etalexis may well have served as the model for the Indian hero Hobomok.

While still residing in Maine, Maria aspired to an ambition worthy of the erudite Margaret Fuller. To her brother, in November 1819, she wrote, "I have long indulged the hope of reading Homer in his own tongue. I have not relinquished it. I look forward to a certain time when I expect that hope, with many others will be realized....I usually spend an hour, after I retire for the night, in reading Gibbon's Roman Empire."<sup>2</sup> There was a practical element in her nature, however, for at the age of nineteen she had no "high-flown expectations," but wrote that, "If I am industrious I shall be independent."<sup>3</sup> This desire to say of all men, "I owe him naught" led her to plan to take a school in Gardiner. When this opportunity to leave Norridgewock presented itself in March, she waited only until "the travelling became tolerable"<sup>4</sup> before beginning her journey. Thus early began her pressing desire to instruct, a desire which was to dominate all of her non-fictional writings. The

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<sup>1</sup>Lycia M. Child, Letters from New York, p. 29

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 3

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 5

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 5

experience gained with children was to be of great help to her when addressing her writings to younger readers. Her exile in Maine was drawing to a close, and at last she was to have an opportunity to live in literary surroundings.

On May 5, 1822, Convers Francis married Abby Bradford Allyn.<sup>1</sup> Shortly thereafter they went to reside in Watertown, where the groom was the newly appointed Unitarian minister. As soon as she attained her majority, Maria Francis joined this household. The promptness with which she left Maine implies not a dissatisfaction with her life in Maine or unhappiness with her beloved sister, but rather a greater devotion to her brother. After years of study she was prepared to take her rightful place amid kindred intellects. At no period in the history of our literature and in no place other than in the small compass of Boston and its surrounding territory were so many of the leading figures of American literature gathered. This was a glorious era to be known to posterity as the "Golden Age" of American literature. In this atmosphere, most conducive to the development of her undeniable genius, Maria Francis formed a girlhood friendship which was to last a lifetime. Eight years younger than she, yet her equal in scholastic ambition, the product of an equally lonely yet precocious childhood, Margaret Fuller was the ideal companion for the serious-minded Maria Francis. Together they read "Locke, as introductory to a course of English metaphysics, and then De Stael on Locke's system."<sup>2</sup> This interest later influenced Maria Francis to write a life of Madame De Stael.

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<sup>1</sup>Francis, op. cit., p. 190

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Ossoli, Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, I, 55

Margaret Fuller valued her friend. Writing to a former teacher at the school of the Misses Prescott, in Groton, Massachusetts, Margaret Fuller introduced her as "a most interesting woman, in my opinion. She is a natural person - a most rare thing in this age of cant and pretention. Her conversation is charming - she brings all of her powers to bear upon it; her style is varied, and she has a very pleasant and spirited way of thinking. I should judge, too, that she possesses peculiar purity of mind."<sup>1</sup> Margaret Fuller appreciated the intellectual honesty of Maria Francis. As an author and as an individual Maria Francis was most aptly described as "a natural person." Her writings, both fictional and non-fictional, were to express her honest convictions. The "purity of mind" so early discernible marked her adult years. She walked through slum and prison, found good in the most depraved and offered help to those who had desperate need of it.

It was a pleasant life in New England in the eighteen-twenties. Boston had long outgrown the Puritan distrust of art and that subject was much in the air. The Athenaeum had acquired a collection of plaster casts of classical statuary chosen by Canova. Here Maria Francis may have acquired the love of statuary which was to remain with her always. Twenty years later she was living a secluded life amid uncongenial surroundings in the town of Northampton, Massachusetts and confessed herself, "ashamed to say how deeply I am charmed with sculpture; ashamed because it seems like affectation in one who has had such very limited

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 55

opportunity to become acquainted with the arts. I have a little plaster figure of a caryatid, which acts upon my spirit like a magician's spell... Repose after conflict - not the repose of innocence, but the repose of wisdom."<sup>1</sup>

She attended the Saturday classes Margaret Fuller held in West Street. "These meetings were attended by half the elite, Elizabeth Hoar from Concord, the three Peabody sisters, Mrs. Emerson, Mrs. George Bancroft, Mrs. Theodore Parker, Maria White, who was engaged to James Russell Lowell. The subjects were Greek mythology, 'What is Life?', the history of art, the meaning of the various dances."<sup>2</sup>

Household duties, social meetings with friends, an intense program of study and contact with the early transcendentalists<sup>3</sup> who met in the modest study in Watertown were not sufficient, however, to satisfy this ambitious girl. In her quiet yet determined way she now entered the field of fiction.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 36

<sup>2</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 241

<sup>3</sup>Alcott's Journal for Monday, September 16th states, "The following persons comprised our circle of conversation, at the home of Dr. Francis: Emerson, Alcott, Channing, Hedge, Ripley, Dwight, Parker, Bartlett, Bartol, May, Stetson, Morrison, Mrs. Ripley and Miss Fuller." Quoted in Hugh Wade, Margaret Fuller, p. 65



## CHAPTER II

### YEARS OF FAME

In 1824 at the age of twenty-two Maria Francis published Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times. The often repeated story found in contemporary accounts<sup>1</sup> that her literary career began with the reading of Dr. John G. Palfrey's review of the long narrative poem Yamoyden,<sup>2</sup> published in the North American Review, has survived to the present. There is a certain romantic flavor to the story of a young girl whiling away an idle hour at noon in the parsonage study with a three year old copy of a magazine and being suddenly inspired by the words, "Whoever in this country first attains the rank of a first rate writer of fiction, we predict will lay his scene here. The wide field is ripe for the harvest, and scarce a sickle yet has touched it."<sup>3</sup> She had never written a word for publication or dreamed of becoming an author "- but the spell was on her, and seizing a pen, before the bell rang for the afternoon meeting she had composed the first chapter of the novel, just as it was printed. When it was shown to her brother, her young ambition was flattered by the exclamation, 'But, Maria, did you really write this? Do you mean what you say that it is entirely your own?'"<sup>4</sup> Thus the romantic story

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<sup>1</sup>Rufus Griswold, The Prose Writers of America (1847), p. 426

<sup>2</sup>James Eastburn and Robert Sands, Yamoyden 1820

<sup>3</sup>J. G. Palfrey, Review of Yamoyden, a Tale of the Wars of King Phillip, North American Review, X, p. 164

<sup>4</sup>Griswold, op. cit., p. 426

of Rufus W. Griswold, a story he may well have heard from the author herself. Behind this momentary impulse were years of preparation. Maria Francis had read widely and written constantly to her beloved brother for many years. Another factor was her awareness of contemporary writings. Any consideration of her inspiration must take into account the great success which met the recent publication of Catherine Sedgwick's Redwood and Cooper's Pioneers.

Six weeks saw the completion of Hobomok, a novel of less than two hundred pages. It was published by Cummings, Hilliard and Company of Boston with the name of the author withheld and signed merely by "An American."<sup>1</sup> Although Yamoyden had introduced miscegenation in the marriage of a white women to an Indian warrior, Hobomok was the first prose romance to introduce this theme. James Fenimore Cooper had upheld the honor of Elizabeth Temple by proving the white blood of her lover, the Young Eagle of the Delawares.<sup>2</sup> The North American Review considered the sequence of events portrayed in Hobomok as "not only unnatural, but revolting to every feeling of delicacy in man or woman."<sup>3</sup> The plot is a variation of the Enoch Arden theme ostensibly based "on an old worn-out manuscript" which accidentally came in the author's way. It was purportedly written by one of the author's ancestors who "fled with the persecuted non-conformists from the Isle of Wright, and about the middle of June,

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia M. Child, Hobomok, 1824

<sup>2</sup>James F. Cooper, The Prairie, 1823

<sup>3</sup>The North American Review, XIX, 263

1820, arrived at Naumkeak on the eastern shore of Massachusetts."<sup>1</sup>  
 The idea that the manuscript was placed in her hands by a friend is told by Maria Francis in the Preface to Hobomok. Frederic, the friend, confesses that, "Your friend P.....'s remarks concerning our early history, have half tempted me to write a New England novel."<sup>2</sup> Maria Francis expresses her surprise, "A novel - when Waverly is galloping over hill and dale, faster and more successful than Alexander's conquering sword? Even American ground is occupied. The Spy is lurking in every closet, - the mind is everywhere supplied with Pioneers on the land, and is soon likely to be with Pilots on the deep."<sup>3</sup>

Despite this awareness Maria Francis proceeds with the story. The scene is laid at Salemand Tri-mountain, colonial Boston so called before the leveling of its hills. In her descriptions of native scenery she demonstrates that thus early she "has an eye for the beautiful and sublime of external nature."<sup>4</sup> This love of beauty was to permeate all of her later novels.

The plot of Hobomok is based on the improbable situation in which a young well-bred English girl, in a state of insane despondency on hearing of the supposed death of her lover, offers herself as the wife

<sup>1</sup>Ch'd, Hobomok., p. 7

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Preface

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Preface

<sup>4</sup>North American Review, XIX, 262

of an Indian chief. For three years she lives not unhappily with him in his wigwam and bears him a "hopeful son." At the end of that time her white lover returns and is met in the forest by her husband. There ensues one of the most fantastic of all fictional renunciations. Hobomok first proposes that he leave his wife and child that, "Mary may sing the marriage song in the wigwam of the Englishman."<sup>1</sup> Not to be outdone in generosity, George Brown also offers to renounce Mary. "No," he tells Hobomok, "She is your wife. Keep her, and cherish her with tenderness... I will be as generous as you have been. I will return from whence I came, and bear my sorrows as I may, Let Mary never know that I am alive. Love her, and be happy."<sup>2</sup> The final renunciation is, however, that of Hobomok. "His voice choked and the tears fell bright and fast"<sup>3</sup> as Hobomok said, "Be kind to my boy." He then took one last look at his wife and child, divorced his wife as he married her, by the custom of his tribe, and went to seek a grave "far off among the red men in the west."<sup>4</sup> With unseemly haste the lovers are reunited and marry in three days. Years pass, and little Hobomok, "whose Indian blood has been forgotten, becomes a distinguished graduate at Cambridge and when he left that infant university, he departed to finish his education in England."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Child, Hobomok, p. 174

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 174

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 174

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 174

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 174

Both historical and fictional personages are presented among the characters. The historical group as Governor Endicott, Lady Arabella Johnson and her husband "are generally very well conceived and supported; the sketches of society and manners are drawn with a faithful hand; the historical incidents are detailed with a truth and spirit, which give animation and interest to the story."<sup>1</sup> The fictional characters are less restrained. Lady Mary, daughter of the Earl of Rivers and mother of Mary Conant, is a gentle figure overshadowed by her stern and uncompromising husband. Charles Brown, the hero, educated as a lawyer at Oxford, is strong only in his religious convictions for which, at the instigation of Mary's father, he is driven from the colony. Hobomok is a most un-Indian character in keeping with the noble savage tradition. Often he "pursued his way through the woods, whistling and singing as he went, in the joyfulness of his heart."<sup>2</sup> Physically, "he was one of the finest specimen of elastic, vigorous elegance of proportion, to be found among his tribe. His long residence with the white inhabitants of Plymouth had changed his natural fierceness of manner."<sup>3</sup> Mentally he is a self-sacrificing, sentimental Prince Charming easily accounted for by the age and sex of the author. Mary Conant, described as "a Parian statue, or one of those fair visions which fancy gives to slumber,"<sup>4</sup> or again as, "a lily weighted down by the pitiless pelting of the storm;

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<sup>1</sup>North American Review, XIX, 262

<sup>2</sup>Child, Plymouth, p. 173

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 74

a violet shedding its soft, rich perfume on blackness and desolation,"<sup>1</sup> is the least realistic of all the characters. She is a high born and delicate maiden who has become well adjusted to the hardships of colonial life. The degree to which the reader has accepted her in the early chapters of the novel intensifies the embarrassment of the catastrophe.

Among the minor characters Sarah Olham, James Hopkins and Mr. Collier enact the proposal scene to be made famous in The Courtship of Miles Standish. On being presented by Mr. Collier with a written proposal from James Hopkins, Sarah replies, "When you set out upon other men's business, I advise you to do it faithfully, but never the less to keep an eye upon your own."<sup>2</sup> As Sarah lacks the nobility and feminine tact of Priscilla, so Mr. Collier lacks the Puritanic conscience which is the basis of the struggle in the mind of John Alden. Another similarity is to be found in Part Five of The Courtship of Miles Standish when Longfellow so graphically describes another Hobomok, friend of the white man.

Just in the gray of dawn, as the mists uprose from the  
meadows,  
There was a stir and a sound in the slumbering village  
of Plymouth;  
Clanging and clicking of arms, and the order imperative,  
'Forward!'  
Given in tone suppressed, a tramp of feet, and then  
silence.  
Figures ten, in the mist, marched slowly out of the  
village.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26

Standish the stalwart it was, with eight of his valorous  
 army,  
 Led by their Indian guide, by Hobomok, friend of the  
 white men,  
 Northward marching to quell the sudden revolt of the  
 savage.<sup>1</sup>

All discussions of Hobomok characterize it as the work of a young inexperienced girl to whom Indians were unknown. It is true that Hobomok is an idealized savage in the noble savage tradition. No such Indian hero walked the wilderness. Yet Maria Francis knew the Indians of the Penobscot region. She knew in particular old Captain Neptune, chief of the tribe, and his warrior nephew, Etalexis. Sharing their humble meal in a hemlock forest, the young and impressionable Maria formed a romantic conception of the majestic young hero. This impression was fresh in her mind in the year 1841.<sup>2</sup> When then she determined as early as 1824 to write a novel of the Indian, Etalexis must have contributed much to the character of Hobomok. The wigwam of Hobomok and the life of Mary with her Indian husband and aged mother may be based on genuine knowledge of Indian manners and customs.

The only importance of this novel today is that it is one of the first novels with its scene laid in colonial New England. A contemporary account, however, states, "This interesting little tale made its way to the public favor solely by its own merits, and was scarcely noticed by our critics, till their opinions had been rendered of little consequence by the decision of the literary community... in fact a new novel has rarely been seized upon with greater avidity."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henry W. Longfellow, The Courtship of Miles Standish, Part V, p. 174

<sup>2</sup>Lydia M. Child, Letters from New York, p. 29

<sup>3</sup>North American Review, XXII, 400

Two factors, both external, may account for the success of this novel. The authorship soon became known and female literary success was sufficiently rare to be of great interest. The second reason for the popularity of this novel was the ardent desire of the reading public for native fiction. The successful conclusion of the War of 1812 had freed the United States from the danger of foreign domination. The twenty-four United States were conscious of their "manifest destiny," and it was to be expected that the literary independence of the nation should be demanded. Consciousness of national unity increased the demand for a truly American literature. The rapid growth of population, moreover, had a significant effect on the number of readers of popular fiction. The numbers had increased prodigiously. By reconstructing life in early Salem and Plymouth with a degree of success and sympathy, Maria Francis satisfied the patriotic urge at an early date in American fiction.

Honors poured in upon the youthful authoress. The Boston Athenaeum conferred upon her a free ticket of admission, the only time such an honor was conferred upon a woman. Unfortunately the Athenaeum was soon to regret its decision and withdrew the privilege.

Only to her sister did the youthful author express her pleasure in the enthusiasm with which her novel was received. "Praises and invitations," wrote Maria Francis, "have poured in upon me, beyond my utmost hopes... 'I should think more highly of the talent of the woman who could write Hobomok,' Mr. H. says, 'than any other American woman



who has ever written, though to be sure it has its faults.' 'Say nothing of its faults,' urges the editor of the 'North American'; they are the faults of genius, and the beauties weigh them down.' The Misses Osgood<sup>1</sup> held up their hands and exclaim, 'prodigious, prodigious!' I mention these things to you because you want to hear all the talk that is passing."<sup>2</sup>

Although the success of her novel was beyond her expectations Maria Francis, with characteristic independence, looked for a more secure method of earning her living. In 1824 she opened a private school in Watertown. As the sister of the local minister and a noted author she could well be trusted with the education of the children of the town. Character was the first prerequisite of a teacher in the 19th century. Teacher training was incidental. Girls fresh from the classroom began teaching while still in their teens. The Peabody sisters, with as limited an educational background, established a similar school during the same year in Brookline for the children of wealthy Bostonians.

The following year, 1825, the same publishing house offered a new novel by the author of Hobomok. This was The Rebels, or Boston before the Revolution. "Most respectfully inscribed" to George Ticknor, Esq., this novel had a large ready-made audience due to the public acclaim which greeted the first volume of the author.

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<sup>1</sup>The Misses Lucy and Mary Osgood were the daughters of the Reverend Francis S. Osgood.

<sup>2</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 99

The choice of period was unfortunate, for this was the period of the titans of American liberty. Samuel Adams, James Otis, Governor Thomas Hutchinson, and Mather Byles strode the streets of Boston. Only some fifty years had passed since the memorable events portrayed and many still lived who had witnessed them. The works of Adams and Otis were familiar to almost every member of the community, and the story of the struggle for freedom had been told in their own words. It is, however, notable that Maria Francis was so imbued with the spirit of the times that the speech she composed and attributed to James Otis was quoted in all "School Readers" and books of declamation as the stirring words of that patriot. Thomas Higginson writes of:

learning by heart the lines, 'England may as well dam up the waters of the Nile with bullrushes as to fetter the step of Freedom, more proud and firm in this youthful land than where she treads the sequestered glens of Scotland, or crouches herself among the magnificent mountains of Switzerland'<sup>1</sup>

under the impression that it was "a piece of genuine revolutionary eloquence" and of his astonishment to discover "that the high-sounding periods attributed to Otis were really to be found in a young lady's romance."<sup>2</sup> The eloquent but untutored Whitefield offers his fictionalized sermons in words which he might well in actuality have uttered.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 46, quoted in Stevenson's Home Book of Quotations, p. 52 with the footnote, "Mrs. Child's puts this flamboyant speech into the mouth of James Otis, one of the historical characters in her romance."

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, pp. 115-116. A curious interest is shown in the correction of the text in the copy of this volume in the Rare Book Room, Library of Congress. On page 149 Maria Francis wrote, "The spirit of New England may break, but you perceive that it will never bend," This has been corrected in ink to read, "The spirit of New England may bend, but you perceive that it will never break." A marginal note, also in ink, states, "The one who made that correction was a gump and knew nothing of the meaning of the passage." Still another hand has added, "That he didn't!" A fourth hand agrees with "That is my opinion." A fifth careful reader adds, "I vote break is right."

<sup>3</sup>In 1841 in the Boston Book Miss Francis published "The Preaching of Whitefield."

As in Hobomok, Maria Francis lacks control of her non-historical characters. The same tendency toward the over-tragic characterizes the triangle of Grace, Lucretia and Sommerville. Lucretia is a much stronger character than Mary Conant and from the first moment of her appearance to her rejection of Sommerville at the altar, she dominates the book. Had the novel ended with the renunciation scene the unity of the story might have been saved, but the complacent manner in which the heroine then marries a formerly rejected suitor is too realistic to satisfy the readers of romance.

When dealing with historical incidents, Maria Francis displays great merit. The descriptions of the mob which wantonly destroys the library of Governor Hutchinson shows proof of the author's talent. The descriptions of the procession of the nuns in Quebec and of the death bed of Grace are distinguished with a beauty and power which demonstrate the author's ability in portraying the strange and pathetic in literature.

"The author has paid the usual price of an early reputation, that of being compelled to use redoubled exertions in order to prevent it from fading," reported the North American Review, adding that, "We cannot venture to say that her laurels have lost none of their freshness by the present attempt, but on the other hand, we think that her failure is only a partial one, and that it may be ascribed to other causes than want of ability."<sup>1</sup> The author is encouraged to continue, for the article closes with the hope:

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<sup>1</sup>North American Review, XXII, 401

of soon hearing again from the same quarter. We should be happy if our remarks should induce the author to select, for her future attempts, such subjects as will give full scope to the talents, which she indisputably possesses, and to bestow a little more care on the construction of her plot. But at any rate we trust that she will not be discouraged from pursuing her literary labors, as we believe, that when the first feelings of disappointment shall have passed away, the present work, notwithstanding its many defects, will hold a high rank in the estimation of all admirers of description and pathetic eloquence.<sup>1</sup>

With her usual outspoken criticism of religious sects, Maria Francis in The Rebels gave offense to the Calvinistic group who took umbrage at her allusions to Dr. Byles. Of this she wrote to her sister,

The Calvinists, you know, have a fist always doubled for combat. They expect to find the Thirty-Nine Articles supported as manfully in a modern novel as in Dr. Griffin's sermon. I do not think it worth while to battle with them or their doctrines. As mankind advances in the steady march of free and rational principles their absurd tenents will die away, together with image worship, pilgrimages to Mecca, and holy alliances. Indeed their present extraordinary zeal is but the conclusive spasm of approaching dissolution.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the disparagement of this limited group, the fame of Maria Francis spread and Evenings in New England, published in 1825, met with unqualified success. "This book was a charming memorial to Lafayette's visit to the country. She had witnessed his triumphal entrance into Boston, and the overwhelming enthusiasm on Beacon Street when the attempt was made to take out the horses and draw his barouche by hand."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., XXII, 408

<sup>2</sup>Hallowell, op cit., p. 99

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 100

The precocious daughter of the Medford baker had become "The brilliant Miss Francis" and a lion of Boston. Invited by the governor to the reception for Lafayette, she received from that gallant hero a kiss which she vowed would never be washed from her hand. Invitations poured in upon her. "Mr. Ticknor, an aristocrat of the first water (spoken of by some as the 'Croesus of Boston'), would write first to her before inviting other guests, declaring that he desired no one if she could not be one of the company."<sup>1</sup>

At no time was Maria Francis beautiful. In 1873 she wrote to an admirer who requested a photograph, "Mr. Osgood's picture never bore any resemblance to me. I never, at any period of life, had any personal beauty."<sup>2</sup> At the age of twenty-four, at the height of her fame, she must have presented a most pleasing picture. Her wit and vivacity would make her an ornament to any society. It was during this year that Alexander painted her portrait, which she sent to her sister writing, "I hope you will like it. There is a glow and enthusiasms about it which belongs to the author of Hobomok rather than to L. M. Francis."<sup>3</sup>

On August 28, 1826, Maria Francis wrote to her sister, "You have no idea how busy I am. Besides my other work I have engaged to edit a book for children, ninety pages once in two months, and all original matter. Two publishers made the request to me, and I refused, but some Boston ladies finally persuaded me into it."<sup>4</sup> In September of that year,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 100

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript letter, Library of Congress

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 101. This portrait was given to the Medford Historical Society, but unfortunately it has been partially "restored" thus losing much of its authenticity.

<sup>4</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 100

several months before the appearance of the first issue of Nathaniel Willis' Youth's Companion, this publication began as the Juvenile Miscellany, published in Boston by the firm of Putnam and Hunt.<sup>1</sup> The last issue was published in January of 1829. A bi-monthly publication, ninety pages in length, this magazine was deservedly popular. Margaret Fuller, in Women in the 19th Century, wrote that it was "much and deservedly esteemed by children. It was a healthy, cheerful, natural and entertaining companion to them."<sup>2</sup> With nostalgic feeling a writer in the Unitarian Review looks back to the days of the Juvenile Miscellany.

The children sat on the stone steps of their house doors all the way up and down Chestnut Street in Boston, waiting for the carrier. He used to cross the street, going from door to door in a zigzag fashion, and the fortunate possessor of the first copy found a crowd of little ones hanging over her shoulder from the steps above. And then, we went to supper early on Saturdays, for families were large, and every child went to his bath, that the dear old Sunday morning might be greeted with renewed purity and in fresh linen! How forlorn we were if the carrier was late!<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Higginson refers to the Juvenile Miscellany as "That delightful pioneer among children's magazines in America."<sup>4</sup>

Maria Francis had a genuine fondness for children. It was with pleasure that she looked back to the days of entertaining many of them while offering moral edification. A whole generation of children were grateful to her for the pleasure of this magazine. In the Preface to

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<sup>1</sup>F. L. Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850, I, p. 492

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Fuller, Women in the 19th Century, p. 314

<sup>3</sup>Unitarian Review, XIX, 526

<sup>4</sup>Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 116

Looking toward Sunset, she recalls, "I occasionally meet people who say to me, 'I had many a pleasant hour, in my childhood, reading your Juvenile Miscellany; and now I am enjoying it over again with my little folks.'"<sup>1</sup> Friends long remembered the pleasure of reading this magazine, for in 1856, writing to thank the author for her latest book, Samuel Johnson write, "But putting this aside - I thank you for the book<sup>2</sup> (in the name of all who love whatsoever is tender, helpful and true) as for everything else you have written since the dear old Juvenile Miscellany, best of gifts to boys and girls."<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary appreciation was all that any author could desire. On September 28, 1826, she wrote in a letter to Doctor Allyn of Duxbury, Massachusetts, "My Miscellany succeeds far beyond my most sanguine expectations. That is, people are generous beyond my hopes."<sup>4</sup>

A more confidential letter was addressed to her sister about this time. This letter freely discusses the success of the Miscellany as well as the author's literary and social success: "The Miscellany is very kindly received. It seems as if the public was resolved to give me a flourish of trumpets, let me write what I will. If I were not vain, I should be a prodigy. Indeed, I have been too much caressed of late by

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Child, Looking toward Sunset, Preface

<sup>2</sup>Looking toward Sunset

<sup>3</sup>Manuscript Letter, Yale University Library

<sup>4</sup>Letters, p. 61

a flattering world. Valuable gifts, jewels, beautiful dresses pour in upon me, invitations beyond acceptance, admiring letters from all parts of the country. The world seldom smiled so graciously on one so little worthy of its notice."<sup>1</sup>

These were the years of fame when the literary world offered adulation to this young girl barely out of her teens. During these years only a strong sense of independence kept her from losing her firm grasp on reality. That same spirit saved her from regret when she faced an angry nation in the name of an oppressed race.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Hallowell, op. cit., p. 101



### CHAPTER III

#### YEARS OF HAPPINESS

At twenty Maria Francis was the object of literary adulation. During this period she expressed a strong determination never to marry. "Nature," she wrote, "never intended me for anything but single life, and I am not going to quarrel with her plans."<sup>1</sup> There must have been many who admired this petted darling of Cambridge and Boston. Yet the first mention of the one who was to change her attitude is found in a modest entry in her Journal under the date of December 2, 1824, when she writes, "Mr. Child dined with us at Watertown. He possesses the rich fund of an intelligent traveller without the slightest tinge of a traveller's vanity."<sup>2</sup>

David Child, who thus met with the approval of Maria Francis, was the third son of Zachariah and Lucia Bigelow Child. He was born in West Boylston, Massachusetts on July 8, 1794, one of eight children. His father had been a Revolutionary soldier, a brother Captain John Child, who finally added a terminal "e" to the name, carried on the military tradition as an outstanding West Point graduate.<sup>3</sup>

David Lee Child was an accomplished scholar and traveller, when in 1824, he returned to America from his position of attache to the American legation at Portugal. He had served with Alexander Everett, then American minister under the presidency of John Quincy Adams. Now thirty years of

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Hallowell, op. cit., p. 102

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 102

<sup>3</sup>Elias Child, Genealogy of the Child, Childs, and Childe Families, pp. 556-558

age, David Child was a Harvard graduate and former sub-master of the Boston Latin School. He was and always would be an ardent defender of liberty. In 1820 he had resigned his post in Lisbon to go to Spain to fight against the French, saying that "he felt it always his duty to help secure and defend liberty."<sup>1</sup>

Child settled in Watertown to study law in the office of his maternal uncle, Tyler Higelow. During his stay in Watertown, he met, at the home of George Ticknor Curtis, Maria Francis, famous sister of the local minister. The romance between them was a spirited one marked by "banter and mutual criticism, amounting some times to what might be taken as evidence of mutual repugnance."<sup>2</sup> Things continued in this manner for four years with Maria Francis exercising her wit in pretended aversion of David Child whenever they met in public, while in her journal writing of him, on January 26, 1825, after just one month's acquaintance, "He is the most gallant man that has lived since the sixteenth century and needs nothing but helmet, shield and chain armor to make him a complete knight of chivalry."<sup>3</sup>

At the end of four years of this banter which successfully camouflaged a deep and lasting affection, David Child asked Maria Francis to be his wife. He was now an established Boston lawyer, a member of the Massachusetts State legislature and editor of the Massachusetts Journal, a leading Adams

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<sup>1</sup>Harper's Magazine, LXXXI, p. 719

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 719

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 8

paper.<sup>1</sup> He may well have felt that his prospects warranted this step. This unusual proposal took place at the home of George Ticknor Curtis. Then a mere youth, Curtis seems to have eluded the vigilance of his mother and witnessed the proceedings while enthroned in some nook sacred to the hiding of small boys. He wrote of the occasion:

One evening, about nine o'clock, he Child rode out of Boston on horseback, and instead of leaving his horse at a livery-stable, he tied him by his bridle rein to a post at my mother's front door, which opened directly on the street, at the top of two or three steps, and then he came into the parlor to see Miss Francis. My mother, who believed that the denouement had come, or was coming, retired to her chamber, and sent me to bed. Mr. Child pressed his suit most earnestly. The lady was a long time making up her mind. Ten o'clock came, then eleven, then twelve. The horse, grown impatient and no doubt very cold and hungry, repeatedly put his forefeet upon the wooden steps and stamped away, as much as to say, 'Take me home, or let me go by myself.' Mr. Child went out once or twice to pacify him, then returned on with the momentous conversation. At last, just as the clock was on the stroke of one, he went. Miss Francis, when the horse's foot-falls ceased to be heard, rushed to my mother's room, and told her that she was engaged to Mr. Child.<sup>2</sup>

This event took place in September of 1827. The following month Maria Francis wrote apologetically to her sister:

I blush that I should have been absolutely engaged more than a month, without having found a moment to tell you of the important news. Mr. Child's extreme devotion and my own excess of happiness must form my excuse for this negligence. Indeed, my dear sister, I am happy, happy, happy, beyond my own imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Her choice did not meet with the cordial approbation of her friends and family. "Mr. David Lee Child was a most accomplished scholar and

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<sup>1</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, IV, p. 65

<sup>2</sup>Harper's Magazine, LXXXI, pp. 719-720

<sup>3</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 103

refined gentleman, of unquestioned integrity and moral worth, had travelled extensively in Europe, was familiar with ancient and modern languages, was courtly in his manners; but with all these desirable qualities was one most undesirable - a genius for experiments, without counting the cost."<sup>1</sup>

Preparations for the wedding proceeded and gifts arrived. Maria Francis described the gifts and preparations for the wedding. "A pretty butter knife and cream ladle, - a study lamp, - from Mrs. Thaxter<sup>2</sup> - Mrs. White<sup>3</sup> sent me a keg of tongues - Mrs. Tyler Bigelow<sup>4</sup> a pair of plated candle sticks, Emily Marshall<sup>5</sup> and Mary M., polished steel snuffers on a plated tray. My mantua-maker has been here a week. I have a claret-colored silk plisse', lined with straw colored silk, made in the extent of the mode, enough to make anybody stare; one black figured levantine silk, and one swiss muslin. My wedding gown is India muslin, a good deal trimmed with white satin. Clarissa Bigelow is to be bridesmaid, and I have bought thirty-five pounds of cake of Nichols."<sup>6</sup> This amount of cake would indicate a large wedding of about three hundred guests.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 103

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Thaxter was the mother of Levi Thaxter, the Browning scholar.

<sup>3</sup>Mrs. White was the mother of Maria White, James Russell Lowell's first wife.

<sup>4</sup>Mrs. Bigelow was the aunt of the groom.

<sup>5</sup>Miss Marshall, considered the most beautiful girl in Boston, was a life-long friend of Maria Francis.

<sup>6</sup>Hallowell, op. cit., p. 104

<sup>7</sup>This estimate is based on the opinion of a modern caterer.

On October 19, 1828 Lydia Maria Francis married her knight and moved to a small house on Harvard Street, in Boston. This "proper little martin box was furnished with very plain gentility."<sup>1</sup>

George Curtis, who visited the bride in her new home, reported, "She kept no servant, and did her own cooking. She had prepared a savory dish, consisting of a meat-pie, perhaps mutton, baked in a small oven, and there were roasted or baked potatoes, and a baked Indian pudding. There was no dessert, and no wine, no beverage of any kind but water, not even a cup of tea or coffee."<sup>2</sup>

The perfect mental accord between David and Maria Child was demonstrated when, not long after their marriage, a Spanish pirate ship was captured and brought to Boston. The men were charged with extreme cruelty and piracy on the high seas. Death would have been meted out to them, but David Child, who had an affinity with lost causes and forlorn hopes, offered his services in their behalf. Wendell Phillips tells of the manner in which Maria Child espoused the cause in which her husband concerned himself. Though it was the depth of winter, she made the trip to Washington by stage-coach to ask presidential intervention. Employing all her eloquence Maria Child is said to have entreated President Jackson on her knees, without avail, to spare the lives of the pirates. The president replied, "By the Eternal, let them hang!" Wendell Phillips records, however, that it was through her intervention that a fair trial was secured for these miserable men. Thus early in married life did

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<sup>1</sup>Mallowell, op. cit., p. 103

<sup>2</sup>Harper's Magazine, LXXXI, p. 720

Mrs. Child align herself with the causes which her husband espoused. The very oneness of thought which characterized this most happy marriage was to cost Lydia Maria Child financial security and contemporary fame, a sacrifice which she was never to regret.

Although her family background was such as to make her receptive to anti-slavery feeling, Maria Child had taken no part in Abolition activities until David Child, always a defender of the oppressed, added his influence. He had placed his legal talents at the service of the fugitive slaves and thereby ruined his chances to rise in the legal profession. It was a surprise even to members of the Abolition Society when she first appeared at meetings. Little did they realize that here was a force which would tirelessly be exerted in behalf of the slave.

The present was, however, made up of housework and frugal living which she was able to put to use, for after one year of strict economy and faithfulness to the humblest domestic duties, Maria Child wrote the Frugal Housewife. This volume demonstrated her ability to change from the regions of fiction and romance to those of fact and duty. The great variety of cook books, especially Amelia Summers' American Cookery<sup>1</sup> and Eliza Leslie's 75 Receipts<sup>2</sup>, already on the market made finding a publisher difficult.<sup>3</sup> Finally, however, in 1829 Carter and Hendee, as well as Marsh and Capen, speculated on the book and found it very profitable as more than six thousand

<sup>1</sup>Amelia Summers, American Cookery, Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796

<sup>2</sup>Eliza Leslie, 75 Receipts, Boston: Monroe and Francis, 1828

<sup>3</sup>Preface to Mother's Book

copies were sold in a single year.<sup>1</sup> Thirty-five<sup>2</sup> editions followed in rapid succession, the title being changed in 1832, after seven editions, to The American Frugal Housewife. British demand resulted in twelve editions published in London and Glasgow, while the interest of the German Hausfrau accounted for nine further editions. True New England thrift had indeed found a wide and appreciative audience. With this volume Maria Child found her forte, for it was instructing others for their own good.

This curious volume which met with such phenomenal success is a "Feminine Poor Richard's Almanac, a treasure of New England household lore that showed, with an abundance of quaint detail, how one could live on less than a dollar a day."<sup>3</sup>

The Frugal Housewife was dedicated to "those who are not ashamed of economy."<sup>4</sup> The author has no apology to offer for this cheap little book of economical hints except her deep conviction that such a book is needed. In this case, "renown is out of the question, and ridicule is a matter of indifference."<sup>5</sup>

Ridicule came from the pen of N. P. Willis, who satirically commented on her dictum that, "Hard gingerbread was good to have in the family - it kept so well." This attack was answered by The North American Review with considerable severity, "As to remarks upon the volume, made by some one, we never cared to inquire who, - evidently clever, but as evidently a

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Preface

<sup>2</sup>Only 33 editions listed in Encyclopedia Britannica, V, p. 467

<sup>3</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 189

<sup>4</sup>Lydia Child, The Frugal Housewife, Title page

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 8

tyro in culinary luxuries, and who should have known better withal than to snarl at a lady, while he had the advantage of a periodical to do it in, - to say nothing of their want of gallantry in the abstract, - we held them to be altogether in bad taste. We must resolutely maintain that 'hard ginger bread is nice.'<sup>1</sup>

This volume is more than a cookery book. It is in reality a series of wholesome bits of advice from the manner in which children's early training should begin to hints on health. Many of the latter seem ridiculous in the light of modern science but were the accepted medical procedure of the 1830's. Domestic education was considered most desirable by Mrs. Child. A "superficial acquaintance with such accomplishments as music and drawing" so characteristic of female education of her day she considered, "useless and undesirable... No one should be taught to consider them valuable for mere parade and attraction. Making the education of girls such a series of 'man traps' makes the whole system unhealthy, by poisoning the motives."<sup>2</sup> Accustomed to travel only by necessity and able to find ample amusement by her own hearth, she considered "the rage for traveling and for public amusements" the worst kinds of extravagances which have most undesirable effects "on our purses and our habits."<sup>3</sup>

The variations of the British and American versions are such as to appeal to national pride. Practical changes such as the monetary system are made. There are minor changes, such as the use of New England rum

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<sup>1</sup>North American Review, XXXVII, p. 142

<sup>2</sup>Lydia Child, The Frugal Housewife, p. 119

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 127



to wash the hair in the American version is altered to Jamaica rum for the same purpose in the British edition. One can only speculate as to whether or not the same healthful qualities are to be found in Munich beer in those editions which were printed in Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Higginson recalls the pleasure with which he read this volume as a child.

Going beyond mere carnal desires, we read also the wholesome direction 'to those who are not ashamed of economy.' We were informed that 'children could early learn to take care of their own clothes,' - a responsibility at which we shuddered; and also that it was a good thing for children to gather blackberries, - in which we heartily concurred. There, too, we were taught to pick up twine and paper, to write on the backs of old letters, like paper-saving Pope, and if we had a dollar a day, which seemed a wild supposition, to live on seventy-five cents. We all read, too, with interest, the hints on the polishing of furniture and the education of daughters, and we got our first glimpses of political economy from the 'Reasons for Hard Times.' So varied and comprehensive was the good sense of the book that it surely would have seemed to our childish minds infallible, but for one fatal admission, which through life I have recalled with dismay, - the assertion, namely, that 'economical people will seldom use preserves.' This was a sumptuary law, against which the soul of youth revolted.<sup>2</sup>

The North American Review praised The Housewife as "intelligible to all; if it be not, it will not be for want of plainness in telling the truth, or of directness in the application of the remarks to many of our domestic prejudices and follies."<sup>3</sup>

A companion piece to The Frugal Housewife was the short-lived Family Nurse. The purpose is set forth in the Preface by the author.

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<sup>1</sup>There is no copy of the German edition listed in the Union Catalogue as available in the United States.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 120

<sup>3</sup>The North American Review, XXXVII, p. 143

This book merely contains the elements of nursing, and is by no means intended to supersede the advice of a physician. It is simply a household friend, which the inexperienced may consult on common occasions, or sudden emergencies, when medical advice is either unnecessary, or cannot be obtained.... For many reasons, the preparation of this work has been an arduous and disagreeable task.

With unusual frankness Mrs. Child confesses,

I should take undue credit to myself if I professed that the usefulness of such a book was my strongest motive. If any other than very practical works would sell extensively, I fear I should still be lingering in more poetic regions.<sup>1</sup>

The volume is divided into three parts. The first is devoted to Hints for the Preservation of Health, the second to Food and Drink for Invalids, while the third is concerned with Children. The scientific accuracy of this book, even in 1837, seems doubtful. Perhaps the rather amazing statement that, "A child constantly nursed from one breast is apt to grow crooked, and acquire the habit of squinting, from having the eyes constantly directed to one point,"<sup>2</sup> may in some measure explain why this book, although revised by a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society, was not a success.

During these busy years while she spent so much time in the field of practical writings, Mrs. Child was a most devoted wife. The extent of her deep devotion to her husband can best be told in her own words contained in a letter to her "Dearest Husband," written on August 8, 1830 while she was taking a holiday at Phillips Beach, Massachusetts:

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Child, The Family Nurse, Preface

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 35

Here I am in a snug little old-fashioned parlor, at a round table, in a rocking chair, writing to you, and the greatest comfort I have is the pen-knife you sharpened for me just before I came away. As you tell me sometimes, it makes my heart leap to see anything you have toubled. The house here is real old-fashioned, neat, comfortable, rural, and quiet. There is a homespun striped carpet upon the floor, two profiles over the mantelpiece, one of them a solidier placed in a frame rather one-sided, with a white shirt ruffle, a white plume, and a white epaulette; a vase of flowers done in water colors, looking sickly and straggling about as if they were only neighbors-in-law, and Ophelia with a quantity of 'carrotty' hair, which is thrown over three or four rheumatic trees, and one foot ankle deep in water, as if she were going to see which she liked best, hanging or drowning.... The old lady is just like your good mother just such honest shoulders, just such motions, a face very much like hers, and precisely the same kind of motherly ways. I am sure you would be struck with the resemblance. I like the whole family extremely. They are among the best specimens of New England farmers, as simple and as kind as little children... In the stillness of the evening we can hear the sea dashing on the beach, 'rolling its eternal bass' amid the harmony of nature. I went down to a little cove between two lines of rocks this morning, and having taken off my stockings, I let the saucy waves come dashing and sparkling into my lap. I was a little sad, because it made me think of the beautiful time we had, when we washed our feet together in the mountain waterfall. How I do wish you were here. It is nonsense for me to go a 'pleasuring' without you. It does me no good, and every pleasant sight makes my heart yearn for you to be with me. I am very homesick for you; and my private opinion is, that I shall not be able to stand it a whole week. As for the place itself, it is exactly what I wanted to find. Oh, how I do wish we had a snug little cottage here, and just income enough to meet very moderate wants. I have walked about a mile to-day, and got well muddled by plunging into a meadow after that brightest of all bright blossoms, the cardinal flower. My dear husband, I cannot stay away a week.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the deep affection of this couple. This love was to continue for a lifetime and bring the greatest happiness into their lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 10

There is, however, in this letter a hint of the reason her friends objected to this marriage. The "snug cottage" for which she longed was to be a rather uncomfortable home in Wayland which came to her from her father. Undeniable as were the intellectual powers of David Child, from the first he lacked the ability to be a "good provider" a characteristic well respected in New England.

It was necessary for Maria Child to continue her writing, which she did with unceasing diligence publishing the Mother's Book in 1831. In this volume dedicated "To American Mothers, on whose intelligence and discretion the safety and prosperity of our Republic so much depend,"<sup>1</sup> Maria Child utilized her experience as a teacher and editor of the Juvenile Miscellany. Stating that she cannot "offer a better or more appropriate introduction to this work,"<sup>2</sup> the author opens the volume with an extract from Convers Francis' Discourse on the Errors in Education.<sup>3</sup> Freely admitting the adage that, "they who have no children, always know how to manage them well,"<sup>4</sup> Maria Child, although childless, feels that she is qualified to speak because of her "strong love for children, and habitual observation of all that concerns them."<sup>5</sup> The principles subscribed to in this volume are pedagogically sound today. The illustrations and method are, in the light of present scientific knowledge, perhaps

<sup>1</sup>Lydia M. Child, The Mother's Book, Dedication

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., vii

<sup>3</sup>Convers Francis, Errors in Education, 1828

<sup>4</sup>Lydia M. Child, The Mother's Book, p. 170

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 170

less valid. From earliest infancy, the author wrote, children should be surrounded by affection and taught to observe. Books have a prominent place in the education of the young. Her experience in writing for children had shown her that, "The books chosen for young people should as far as possible combine amusement with instruction; but it is very important that amusement should not become a necessary inducement."<sup>1</sup>

From her own intense interest she wrote:

I think a real love of reading is the greatest blessing education can bestow, particularly upon a woman. It cheers so many hours of illness and seclusion; it gives the mind something to interest itself about, instead of the concerns of one's neighbors, and the changes of fashion; it enlarges the heart, by giving extensive views of the world; it every day increases the point of sympathy with an intelligent husband; and it gives a mother materials for furnishing the minds of her children. Yet I believe a real love of reading is not common enough among women.<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary books are discussed with a great freedom of opinion in the sixth edition of this volume published in 1844.

The morality should be in a book, not tacked upon the end of it... Charlotte Temple had a nice good moral at the end, I dare say was written with the best intention, yet I believe few works do so much harm to girls of fourteen or fifteen... The wisest way to create a distaste for sickly works of fiction, is early to form a taste for those which are pure and healthy. Highest in this class stand the admirable writings of Frederika Bremer... The great charm of this popular writer is, that she is deeply religious, without being theological.<sup>3</sup>

Mary Hewitt's writings are considered inferior to those of Frederika

Bremer only in that, "there is not such deep spirituality, such close

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 80

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 80

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-96

communion with the interior of the soul."<sup>1</sup> Miss Edgeworth's books are, "admirably constructed as stories, and are full of practical good sense, philosophic discrimination, felicitous illustration, and pure morality; but the sentiment of worship is absent."<sup>2</sup> To Catherine M. Sedgwick, "whose name alone is sufficient guarantee that the book is safe for young people,"<sup>3</sup> is given the highest praise by the author. Walter Scott's works, which Mrs. Child had herself read as a youngster, must be explained to children as having no aim "of high spirituality" and must be accepted for what they are, "fresh and beautiful paintings of man's outward life, in times of stirring and romantic incident."<sup>4</sup> A list of books "excellent of their kind"<sup>5</sup> is included. Although Robinson Crusoe appears on this list, caution is noted, for this book is considered "not altogether a safe stimulus for a boy of a rambling and adventurous spirit."<sup>6</sup>

In other fields of education Mrs. Child considers arithmetic of great importance especially among women, for "it is a study that greatly tends to strengthen the mind and produce careful habits of thought;" and finally the practical suggestion that, "no estate can be settled without it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 96

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 96

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 97

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 97

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 102

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 106

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 135

Life had taught Mrs. Child two undeniable facts. The first was that it should be an educational objective, "to educate children that they could, in case of necessity, support themselves respectably."<sup>1</sup> A second was that "It is a great mistake to think that education is finished when young people leave school. Education is never finished."<sup>2</sup>

Marriage had taught the author the necessity for practical education. As a result of the three previous years she wrote, "A knowledge of domestic duties is beyond all price to a woman. Everyone ought to know how to sew, and knit, and mend, and cook, and superintend a household. In every situation of life, high or low, this sort of knowledge is a great advantage."<sup>3</sup>

All these educational precepts were accepted by her generation, but in one respect Mrs. Child proves the extent to which she is far in advance of her age. Advanced, in the best sense of the word, she is with regard to a subject which has been frankly discussed only within the last decade - sex.

There is one subject, on which I am very anxious to say a great deal; but on which I can say very little. Judging by my own observation, I believe it to be the greatest evil now existing in education. I mean the want of confidence between mothers and daughters on delicate subjects. Children, from books, and from their own observation, soon have their curiosity excited on such subjects; this is perfectly natural and innocent, and if frankly met by a mother, it would never do harm. But on these occasions it is customary either to put young people off with lies, or still further to excite their curiosity by mystery and embarrassment. Information being refused them at the only proper source, they immediately have

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 137

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 146

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 146

recourse to domestics, or immodest school-companions; and very often their young minds are polluted with filthy anecdotes of vice and vulgarity. This ought not to be. Mothers are the only proper persons to convey such knowledge to a child's mind.<sup>1</sup>

When but two years a bride and only twenty-eight years of age Mrs. Child, expressing her views on matrimony, shows clearly that these two years have taught her much.

There is no subject connected with education which has so important a bearing on human happiness as the views young people are taught to entertain with regard to matrimonial connections. The dreams of silly romance, half vanity, and half passion, on the one hand, and selfish calculation on the other, leave but precious little of just thinking and right feeling on the subject. The greatest and most prevailing error in education consists in making lovers a subject of such engrossing and disproportionate interest in the minds of young girls... But heedless vanity and silly romance, though a prolific source of unhappy marriages, are not so disastrous in their effects as wordly ambition, and selfish calculation. I never knew a marriage expressly for money, that did not end unhappily... But where there is deep well founded love all things will work right in the end.<sup>2</sup>

In the Preface the author had expressed her purpose, "to give the result of my own reading and observation in maxims of plain practical good-sense, written with earnestness and simplicity of style."<sup>3</sup> She was willing to have her readers decide the measure of her success. Once again the author proved the rightness of her judgment in the time and manner of writing for eight American editions were followed by twelve English editions<sup>4</sup> and finally a German edition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 151

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 161

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. vi

<sup>4</sup>Entitled On the Management and Education of Children; being Mrs. Child's Mother's Book, Revised and Adapted to the use of English parents and teachers, London: J. W. Parker, 1835

<sup>5</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica V, p. 467



The pleasure friends found in reading this volume naturally pleased the author. To her brother she wrote happily quoting a letter from "The Old Quaker,"<sup>1</sup> in which he told the author, "I am free to say to thee, it is a most excellent thing."<sup>2</sup> The critics agreed with the friend's opinion. The New York Tribune wrote, "For sound moral instruction and practical good sense, we know of no work of its class worthy to be compared with it."<sup>3</sup>

Again drawing on her experience as a writer for and teacher of children, Mrs. Child published the two volume Girl's Own Book in 1831. This book had a considerable success. Although its youthful readers found much amusement in its pages, instruction was the essential objective. The duties of parents and children were set forth clearly and with directness.

Essentially this volume is addressed to girls. It contains rules for the drollest of games, directions for making ornaments from scrap material, and practical advice on sewing and gardening.

This book owes any measure of importance it still possesses to the illustrator. That peculiar German genius, Francis Graeter, illustrated it with a series of vignettes. He became a personal friend of Maria Child, and his work illustrated her later books, as it did those of Catherine Sedgwick.

<sup>1</sup>Although five years her junior, Maria Child often referred to John Greenleaf Whittier in this matter.

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 13

<sup>3</sup>Publisher's Blurb, Letters from New York, p. 7. This writing refers to the 8th edition.

During the same year Mrs. Child published The Coronal, the title page of which announced it to be "a collection of miscellaneous pieces, written at various times." Most of the tales and verses contained had been previously published in magazines and annuals. Financial necessity may have been a factor in the author's decision to republish at this time.

The tales included are the usual didactically moral ones. The value of this volume today rests with the inclusion of a few short examples of Maria Child's poetic writing. The poem which attained contemporary fame was based on the painting, by Vanderlyn, of Marius seated on the Ruins of Carthage. The North American Review wrote:

We know not that Mrs. Child makes pretensions to poetic distinction, but we freely say that she might lay claim to excellence in this particular, and that with a good degree of success... There are some lines by Mrs. Child, full as high and strong poetry as has appeared in our country, and far better than half of that which is considered orthodox and unapproachable by many of the soi-di-sant judges of the art.<sup>1</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe in the Literati wrote of Maria Child, "Poetry she has not often attempted, but I make no doubt that in this she would excel. It seems, indeed, the legitimate province of her fervid and fanciful nature."<sup>2</sup>

The stanzas which had the greatest popular appeal and were most often quoted were the opening ones:

Pillars are fallen at thy feet,  
Fanes quiver in the air,  
A prostrate city is thy seat, -  
And thou alone art there.

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<sup>1</sup>The North American Review, XXXVII, p. 146

<sup>2</sup>Poe, Literati, p. 99

The fourth stanza clearly shows "her intense appreciation of genius in others, as well as exemplifying the force of her poetic expression."<sup>1</sup>

And genius hath electric power,  
Which earth can never tame;  
Bright suns may scorch, and dark clouds lower,  
Its flash is still the same.

The closing stanza tells of the immortal quality which is possessed by all life:

Yet there is something will not die,  
Where life hath once been fair;  
Some towering thoughts still rear on high,  
Some Roman lingers there!

Perhaps the most famous of Mrs. Child's poetical writings is one which even today is familiar to almost every school child. The school reader is rare which does not include,

Over the river and through the wood  
To grandfather's house we go;  
The horse knows the way  
To carry the sleigh  
Through the white and drifted snow.

to the final delightful,

Over the river and through the wood -  
Now grandmother's cap I spy!  
Hurrah for the fun!  
Is the pudding done?  
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!

In 1832 Mrs. Child began the editing of a series of volumes to be known as the Ladies' Family Library,<sup>2</sup> "which will suit the taste, and interest the feelings of women."<sup>3</sup> The first volume was originally

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 99

<sup>2</sup>Published by Carter and Handee at Boston

<sup>3</sup>Lydia Child, The Biographies of Madame de Staël and Madame Roland., p. vii

advertised as The Biographies of Madame de Stael and Madame Guyon.

"Upon reflection, it seemed very incongruous to place together two characters so opposite, that, had they lived at the same period, they never would willingly have remained long in each other's presence. The spiritual Madame Guyon despised the world as heartily as the intellectual Madame de Stael loved it."<sup>1</sup> The final arrangement of Volume One was to include the biographies of Madame de Stael and Madame Roland, which the editor felt "will prove unusually attractive, both on account of their own great qualities, and the very exciting historical events with which they are so intimately connected."<sup>2</sup> In the second volume, "Madame Guyon will be associated with the pious Lady Russell, with whom she was more nearly contemporary."<sup>3</sup> Plans were made for further volumes, including: Anecdotes of the Wives of Distinguished Men,<sup>4</sup> The Employments and Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations,<sup>5</sup> intended to show the Effects of Christianity on their Character and Situation, Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe, of Madame Larochejaquelein, Princess Lambelle, etc."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. viii

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. vii

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. ix

<sup>4</sup>Published as Good Wives. Boston, Carter, Hendee and Co., 1833. Ladies' Family Library, Vol. III

<sup>5</sup>Published as Brief History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations

<sup>6</sup>The last three volumes were not published, due to the failure of the publishing firm of Carter and Hendee.

The leading volume of this series includes biographies of Madame de Stael and Madame Roland.<sup>1</sup> The life of the more celebrated Madame de Stael is based on Notice sur le Caractère et les Ecrits de Madame de Stael by Madame Necker de Saussure and the manuscripts of Lectures on French literature by Professor George Ticknor, to whom the editor dedicated the volume.<sup>2</sup>

Although highly colored portraits have been penned of the beauty of Madame de Stael, Maria Child describes this dutiful daughter as having "none of the usual pretensions to be called a handsome woman; but there was an intellectual splendor about her face that arrested and riveted attention."<sup>3</sup>

Mademoiselle Necker shared her father's exile in Switzerland at those periods when he was out of favor,<sup>4</sup> but it was during her stay in the brilliant circles of Paris that her "remarkable and obvious superiority could not be cheerfully tolerated by the narrow-minded and the selfish,"<sup>5</sup> for while she "might have been forgiven for being the richest heiress in the kingdom; they could not pardon the fascination of talent, thus eclipsing beauty and overshadowing rank."<sup>6</sup> For, as Mrs. Child sagely remarked, "The power of intellect is borne with less

<sup>1</sup> Lydia Child, The Biographies of Madame de Stael and Madame Roland

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>4</sup> In 1781 and 1789 M. Necker was dismissed from his post in the cabinet, but each time he was recalled. "In September of 1790 Necker resigned after a noisy mob had twice demanded his dismissal." E.D. Brady, A Short History of the French Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Lydia Child, The Biographies of Madame de Stael and Madame Roland, p. 20

patience than the tyranny of wealth; for genius cannot, like money, be loaned at six percent."<sup>1</sup> Thus Mrs. Child accounts for the ill-natured stories to the disparagement of Mademoiselle which circulated for the amusement of all Paris.

In 1786 a marriage of policy was arranged between Mademoiselle Necker and Eric-Magnus, Baron de Stael Holstein, a Swedish nobleman, secretary to the ambassador from the court of Stockholm. The marriage was not a success. Maria Child who deplored marriages of convenience wrote, "Thus the projectors of this match met the usual fate of those, who attempt to thwart nature, and take destiny out of the hands of Providence: it not only made the parties wretched, but it did not even serve the ambitious purposes for which the sacrifice is supposed to have been made."<sup>2</sup>

Madame de Stael's literary career is considered in some detail. Her education prepared her to begin her literary career young. The first of her many writings was Sophia, or Secret Sentiments published when she was but twenty-one years of age. Her tragedy of Lady Jane Grey, published in 1787, had considerable reputation. Of her early writings Maria Child remarks:

To the world they are objects of curiosity, as the first records in the history of an extraordinary mind... Her dramas were written in verse; but she never after attempted poetry, except some slight effort for amusement. Her vigorous and rapid mind was a little impatient under the trammels of French versification. In prose, she was not compelled to sacrifice originality and freedom; and in throwing away her fetters she lost nothing but rhyme, for her soul poured into prose all its wealth of poetry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 21

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 38

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 15

Mrs. Child defends the "Essay on the Passions" and the celebrated "Essay on Literature." The portrayal in the former of too dark and lurid a picture of human mind is excused by "the peculiar circumstances of the times in which she lived, acting on her ardent feelings and powerful imagination."<sup>1</sup> The latter by its very scope "led her into difficulties, and mistakes in this important work; it is, however, a beautiful whole, and deservedly placed her in the first rank among the writers of her age."<sup>2</sup> In reviewing Corinna, published in 1802, Madame de Staël is compared with Rousseau and Byron in that she "wrote from the impulses of her own heart, and threw something of herself into all her fiction."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the volume a high moral tone is maintained. No mention is made of Benjamin Constant, the lover of Madame de Staël, but the portrayal is rather of a dutiful daughter who:

If we are disposed to blame her eagerness for all kinds of distinction, we must remember that her ambitious parents educated her for display, and that she was endowed with talents which made every effort a victory. If there is much to forgive, there is more to admire; and few will censure her, if none speak harshly but those who have had equal temptations. The most partial cannot deny that she had many faults; but they are so consecrated by unrivalled genius, by kindness, disinterestedness, and candor, that we are willing to let the veil of oblivion rest upon them forever, and to remember only that no woman was ever gifted with a clearer head, or a better heart.<sup>4</sup>

This volume includes the life of another revolutionist, Madame Roland. It is, on the whole, a more interesting biography than that of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 37

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 39

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 59

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-109

Madame de Stael. Once again Mrs. Child begins with the early life and education of her subject.

Much of Maria Child's own concern for spiritual guidance, together with her antagonism toward the church of Rome, was revealed in her comment on Madame Roland's religious speculation.

The influences around Madame Roland served to increase the darkness brought upon her by worship of her own intellect. She became a Deist; and sometimes shared the Atheist's incredulity... The fables and absurd ceremonies, with which the church of Rome had become loaded in the course of centuries, no doubt had their share in disturbing the early faith of Madame Roland.<sup>1</sup>

Having discussed this religious crisis, the author dismisses this "painful and unprofitable"<sup>2</sup> subject with the pious hope that Madame Roland's irreligion "was more in her head than her heart."<sup>3</sup>

Maria Child approved Madame Roland's contradiction of the very common but erroneous idea that when she left school education was completed. Throughout her life, "she continued to read and study and never neglected an opportunity of learning anything."<sup>4</sup> When an appropriate age was reached, many suitors for the hand of Mademoiselle Philipon appeared. Her father, who "thought more of money than any other consideration"<sup>5</sup> was anxious that "his daughter should marry a thriving man of business."<sup>6</sup> Mademoiselle Philipon, however, refused all proposals until in 1779, at the age of

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 141

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 141

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 141

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 141

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 151

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 151



twenty-five, she married Jean-Marie Roland de la Platiere, an impoverished youngest son of an opulent family. A daughter, Eudora, was born to them and became the center of her mother's life. The education of a child and household cares were not sufficient to absorb the energies of Madame Roland. Of herself, Madame Roland wrote:

Household cares I never neglected; but I cannot comprehend how a woman of method and activity can have her attention engrossed by them... People who know how to employ themselves, always find leisure moments, while those who do nothing are forever in a hurry... I think a wife should superintend everything herself, without saying a word about it; and with such command of temper, and management of time, as will leave her the means of pleasing by her good-humor, intelligence, and the grace natural to her sex.<sup>1</sup>

This was indeed the philosophy by which Mrs. Child was able to care for her household and carry on her extensive writings.

Such is the biography of Madame Roland. Told with understanding and deep sympathy, it reveals much of woman and her place, as held by Mrs.

Child. In summary she writes of Madame Roland:

I respect and admire almost every point in Madame Roland's character. I love her for preferring the beauties of nature, and the quiet happiness of domestic life, to all the glittering excitements of society; I revere the strictness of her moral principles, the purity of her intentions and the perfect rectitude of her conduct; I admire the vigorous activity of her mind, her unyielding fortitude, and her uniform regard for truth. I warmly sympathize with her enthusiasts for liberty, her hatred of oppression, and her contempt for the insolence of rank.<sup>2</sup>

The facets of the character of Madame Roland which meet with disapproval are expressed with equal candor:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 251

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 255

But I confess I am sometimes startled by the fierceness and boldness of her expressions. I would have had her more compassionate toward that class of people, whose haughty condescension so well deserved her cool contempt. After all, iron-hearted consistency is a quality difficult to admire in woman.<sup>1</sup>

In this criticism is embodied the philosophy of Maria Child, who was first a woman devoted to humble household cares and only secondly a public figure. Contemporary accounts stress the fact that no help was employed in the Child's home from the first small quarters in Boston<sup>2</sup> to her final retirement at Wayland.<sup>3</sup> Both these dwellings were unpretentious, and the manner of living plain. While Mrs. Child was considered an expert in the art of cookery and was always alert to an opportunity to save money, it is clear that as little time as possible was used in these mundane affairs, perhaps as little as Madame Roland's two hours daily. The remaining hours of the day were used in writing and in good works. Evenings were spent in reading what she had written to her husband, and submitting it to his criticism and suggestion. This quiet domestic happiness surrounded by the beauty of nature was the first desire of Mrs. Child, and primarily because of this Madame Roland was to her a more sympathetic character for study than the more socially ambitious Madame de Stael.

The second volume of the Ladies' Family Library, was published in 1832, and entitled The Biographies of Lady Russell and Madame Guyon.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 256

<sup>2</sup>See Harper's Magazine, LXXXI, p. 720

<sup>3</sup>See New England Magazine, n.s. II, p. 411

<sup>4</sup>Lydia Child, The Biographies of Lady Russell and Madame Guyon, Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1836. "The Student's Cabinet Library of Useful Tracts," III, no. 4

This volume seems on the whole more successful than the first one, The Biographies of Madame de Staël and Madame Roland, perhaps due to the fact that the first subject is more sympathetic to the author's interests. Lady Rachel Russell is the English counterpart of Madame Roland in that each was to have her husband tried by the highest tribunal of the land for conspiracy against the government. Lady Russell, however, never knew the horror of prison and execution as did Madame Roland. Each put forth her greatest effort to clear the name of her husband. Lady Russell, during the forty years by which she survived her husband, was fortunate to have his name completely vindicated. In closing, Maria Child remarks on the years of widowhood which Lady Russell passed in retirement, "a weary pilgrimage for one whose heart was ever with him. Blessed be God, we believe in a heavenly home, where her pure and quiet spirit has gone to enjoy an eternal union."<sup>1</sup>

The biography of Madame Guyon is an unusual one, dealing with the life story of a devout Roman Catholic reared in the strict discipline of that church. She was, fifty years later, to be imprisoned in the Bastille on the grounds of heresy, as an apologist for the doctrines of the Quietists. This sect of mystics, which appeared in seventeenth century France, believed in the annihilation of the senses contrary to the Roman Catholic belief in the rational powers of man. The deadening of the senses, which is the essence of the philosophy of the Quietists, is the antithesis of man's moral obligation to develop his potentialities. Maria Child bases

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 137

her biography on the autobiographical Life and Religious Experience of Madame Guyon and La Vie de M. de Fenelon, Archeveque Duc de Cambrai.

On the material plane, the story of the unhappiness of Madame Guyon's marriage and her association with Father LaCombe and the Abbé Felelon, are told in her own words as is her spiritual life with its visions and ecstasies, its abnegations and penances.

The hymns and spiritual poems of Madame Guyon are praised as "full of devotional fervor, and the versification is free and flowing."<sup>1</sup> These have been translated by the English poet, William Cowper.

With admirable restraint Mrs. Child refrains from any comment on this biography. Only in closing does she remark:

I have thus endeavored to give a faithful portrait of one of the most remarkable of the Mystics. I have not deemed it either necessary, or useful, to inform the reader what appeared to me beautiful, or what appeared absurd. It is evident that Madame Guyon sincerely wished to follow the Lord in the path of regeneration; though she was often lost in darkness, and still more frequently bewildered in the dazzling light of her own enthusiasm. I leave my readers to judge of her according to their own opinions.<sup>2</sup>

If rumor ever sullied the marriage of Lydie Maria and David Child, the dedication of Married Women: Biographies of Good Wives should once and forever silence it. By writing a dedication to her husband, describing him as "one who, through every vicissitude has found in his kindness and worth her purest happiness, and most constant incentive to duty," Mrs. Child, after nearly fifty years of marriage, expressed her perfect contentment and happiness in her married state.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 263

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 264

Originally to have been entitled The Wives of Distinguished Men, the title was changed since "Great men have had bad wives; and it seemed undesirable to perpetuate the memory of such."<sup>1</sup>

With the frankness with which she always faced criticism she writes in her Preface;

I have been told that I did not moralize enough, or explain my own opinions with sufficient fullness. To this I can only answer, that I am describing the minds of others, not my own. It seems to me that the beauty of biography consists in simplicity, clearness and brevity. I wish to give faithful portraits of individuals and leave my readers in freedom to analyze their expression.<sup>2</sup>

The good wives selected for biographical treatment range in historical times from ancient Greece and Rome to British matrons who accompanied their husbands to the American colonies. Of American wives in the Republic there are no examples, because while there are many "who have discharged the duties of this important relation in a manner worthy of the highest praise"<sup>3</sup> yet, "that strong fear of ridicule, which is the inevitable result of republican institutions, has made us rather shy of publicly expressing our attachments in glowing terms; in our distrust of French exaggeration, we approach the opposite extreme."<sup>4</sup>

Maria Child was frankly a romantic sentimentalist when discussing the married state. She anticipated that such a charge would be brought against her. In answer she wrote;

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Child, Married Women: Biographies of Good Wives, p. 3

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 9

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 10

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 11

It is true that I have something of what the world calls by this name, (romantic sentimentalist) and I shall probably retain it as long as I live. I am more afraid of believing too little, than of believing too much, and have no inclination to sacrifice happiness to philosophy. In a word, I like superstition better than scepticism, and romance better than policy.<sup>1</sup>

Such a charge could not be avoided on the part of an author who could write:

Domestic love is the only rose we have left of paradise. Alas! that worldly prudence should scornfully cast it away, keeping only the thorn, as a memento that the lovely blossom can exist in a sinful world.<sup>2</sup>

A wife enduring poverty and the loss of her child is not without consolation, for "it is not the power of fate to make a true-hearted woman miserable, while she is blessed with the love and confidence of a kind husband."<sup>3</sup>

Prudence was never a virtue she admired. When advised to be prudent by her brother during the intense excitement in New York in 1834, she scorned to do so. In praise of Martin Luther for his bold and zealous acts against "the insupportable tyranny and gross corruptions of the Church of Rome,"<sup>4</sup> she expresses her conviction that "the timid and the cautious fall into the ranks when the danger is over, and often share the triumph; but what the world calls the 'prudent man' would never answer for a pioneer in the cause of civil or religious liberty."<sup>5</sup>

Faithfulness, even to remaining with her husband until his death by public execution on the fifteenth century torture wheel, as did Gertrude

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 12

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 64

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 85

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 128

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 129

Vonderwart,<sup>1</sup> is expected of this exemplary group of women. Suicide, rather than an enforced unfaithfulness, is not harshly judged by the author in the case of Panthea, wife of Abradatas, for, "she lived before the light of the gospel had dawned upon the world; and in those stern times, self-sacrifice, under such circumstances, was deemed a sublime virtue."<sup>2</sup>

Selina, countess of Huntingdon, receives due praise for her "tranquil, meek dignity."<sup>3</sup> Among her many virtues was a complete disregard of the world of fashion. Such a reaction to fashion dictates was shared by the author. The countess' generosity in bestowing "more than one hundred thousand pounds in acts of public and private benevolence"<sup>4</sup> is another facet of character which, within her more slender means, Maria Child emulated.

Couples so devoted as to possess a "strange sympathy of nature" which causes the one to die at the hour of the other's death are, as were Lord and Lady Eiron, ancestors of the poet, most fortunate since they are saved from a life, "whose bitterest portion is a widowed heart."<sup>5</sup>

The simple rural life so dear to Maria Child was wished for by many women whose husbands' life work took them into an ostentatious way of life. While Lord and Lady Fanshawe were living in magnificence at the court of Spain, "they often sighed for a country residence in England."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 164-169

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 175

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 211

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 210

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 53

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 107

This volume was published in 1833 by Carter and Hendee as the third volume of the Ladies' Family Library. It met with considerable success, having gone through six editions by 1855 and continuing to be revised after 1871. It is a curious volume, containing the biographies of some forty women; the individual biographies varying in length from a few words to a lengthy discussion. These biographies embody those characteristics of a happy marriage which Mrs. Child felt were necessary for the continuance of that happy state. Throughout the volume the virtue of obedience is praised most highly. While she firmly believed in the equality of women, Maria Child was not an advocate of women's rights as such. Although she was the financial support of her particular family, she always acted only after consulting with her husband, whom she always considered the leader of the destinies of the family. Frankly and avowedly the author believed that to have a kind and understanding husband was the greatest gift that heaven afforded a mortal woman. She further felt that she personally had been so blessed by divine providence and did not, as is shown in the preface to this volume, hesitate to show to all the world the existence of this deep and lasting affection.

That such a book had practical value as giving splendid examples which might be followed by contemporary readers was suggested by the Southern Patriot. "We commend," its critic wrote, "this pleasing collection to all those women who are ambitious, like its subjects, to become good wives."<sup>1</sup>

The fourth and fifth volumes of the Ladies' Family Library were made up of Mrs. Child's two-volume Brief History of the Condition of Women, in

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<sup>1</sup> Publisher's Blurb, Letters from New York, p. 7



Various Ages and Nations. The first volume dealt with the women of Asia and Africa. The second volume was concerned with the women of Europe, America and the South Sea Islands.

These books were regarded by the leaders of the Women's Rights movement as a major step in the advancement of that organization<sup>1</sup> although at no time was Mrs. Child affiliated with it.

Both volumes are mere assemblages of fact. They begin and end abruptly and show no evidence of any attempt at correlation or development of an underlying philosophy. The only possible use they possessed was as a storehouse of facts concerning the past and present condition of women, but since no index seems to have been considered, the volumes are indeed cumbersome to use.

Contemporary acclaim, however, met the publication, as it did all of the author's literary work. Five editions followed rapidly. The last edition carried the half title; Francis and Company's Cabinet Library of Choice Prose and Poetry.

One of the most striking characteristics of Mrs. Child's writings was the ease with which she turned from fictional portrayals to the more practical aspects of literature. Financial necessity compelled her to concentrate on this less congenial type of writing. While interested in the ideal, she was forced to concern herself with the actual. These practical volumes were of value for their genuine desire to be helpful. The editing of five volumes of the Ladies' Family Library for Carter, Hendee and Company gave Mrs. Child an opportunity to set forth her considered

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<sup>1</sup>Victory, How Women Won It, p. 159

opinion that the happiest women were those who were willing to be subject to the authority of their husbands. No active advocate of women's rights, Mrs. Child was angered only when women were deprived of what she felt was their rightful privileges. Married without the approval of her family, an unusual occurrence in the early nineteenth century, Maria Child showed that independence of spirit which was to lead her to espouse the most unpopular of all the causes which interested the civic-minded citizens of this most humanitarian century.

## CHAPTER IV

### YEARS OF SERVICE

#### 1. Abolitionist Writings

In his remarks on the occasion of the funeral of Mrs. Child, Wendell Phillips, speaking as a friend of many years, said, "We shall better understand her life if we remember it was governed by the divine rule, 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' This, in fact, explains her courage, her economy, her painstaking industry, her interest and activity in reforms, and the scrupulous fidelity with which she cultivated every power."<sup>1</sup>

Although actively interested in reform throughout her life, the first burden Maria Child chose to bear was that of the slave. Slavery was, in the 1830's, the most controversial subject of the decade. Only after mature consideration did she ally herself with the Anti-Slavery movement. Even after her marriage she confessed that she had previously felt a strong prejudice against this group, "but a candid examination" convinced her that she "had made a common mistake of taking things for granted."

As she had followed her husband's interest in the Spanish pirates, so she may have been convinced by him of her "mistake." David Child had long been interested in the cause. This interest was clearly shown by a series of letters on this subject to Edward S. Abby, an English philanthropist.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 263

<sup>2</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, IV, p. 65

Whatever the cause of her alignment with this unpopular group, once convinced that she was following the summons of conscience, Mrs. Child perserved with no thought of social or economic consequences.

In 1833, with her popularity assured, her book sales approaching best seller proportions, Maria Child threw all to the winds for "an unpopular but most righteous case,"<sup>1</sup> by publishing a modest volume entitled An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans.<sup>2</sup> In taking up the burden of the enslaved race she was "fully aware of the unpopularity of the task" but though she "expected ridicule and censure," she had no fear of the results of such a publication, for "should it be the means of advancing, even one single hour, the inevitable progress of truth and justice," she "would not exchange the consciousness for all Rothschild's wealth or Sir Walter's fame."<sup>3</sup>

At a most dangerous moment in the rising tide of anti-slavery feeling, with calmness and conscientiousness which were to characterize all her abolitionist writings, she scandalized Boston with her Appeal. The times, rather than the actual volume, must explain the storm of indignation which followed. The use of the word Appeal in the title may have brought to the minds of many the essay of David Walker, published in Boston in 1829, entitled Walker's Appeal in Four Articles, together with a Preamble to the

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Child, An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans, Preface

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Title

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Preface

Colored Citizens of the World but in Particular and very expressly to those of the United States of America. This most vigorous denunciation of slavery in calling to the Negro to rise up and throw off his yoke instilled fear into many a planter who remembered the horrors of San Domingo.

The feeling in Boston ran high against the abolitionists.

One might have sixteen Boston quarterings and a gallery of Copleys and Stuarts, but, if one uttered a phrase with 'Colour' in it, one's cousins would cut one dead in Beacon Street. One appeared in the press as an 'aristocrat,' but also as a 'hyena' and a 'squash.'<sup>1</sup>

The Appeal brought Maria Child "a storm of indignation from an incensed public. Justice, charity and self-control were almost laid aside. She received harsh criticism and censure from her literary associates, the maledictions of foes, and a threatened withdrawal of patronage by a large portion of those who had previously delighted in her books."<sup>2</sup> Harriet Martineau describes Maria Child as "a lady of whom society was exceedingly proud before she published her Appeal, and to whom society has been extremely contemptuous ever since."<sup>3</sup> The practical application of this reaction to Maria Child's new venture is summed up by Harriet Martineau, "Her works were bought with avidity before, but fell into sudden oblivion as soon as she had done a greater deed than writing any of them."<sup>4</sup> Wendell Phillips, in his remarks at the funeral of Maria Child stated that:

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, op. cit., p. 391

<sup>2</sup>Alfred Hudson, "The Home of Lydia Maria Child," New England Magazine, II, p. 403

<sup>3</sup>Harriet Martineau, The Martyr Age in America, p. 216

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 204

when in 1833, she published her Appeal, she sent a copy to the Boston Athenaeum... The directors immediately withdrew her ticket of admission. And a prominent lawyer, afterwards a notorious attorney-general of Massachusetts, is said to have used tongs to fling the obnoxious volume out of his window. This is a sad record; but to recall it is only fair tribute to the young author, who never faltered; only gave the hated and struggling cause a more liberal support. Hardly ever was there a more costlier sacrifice. Few of us can appreciate it today. Narrow means just changing to ease; after a weary struggle, fame and social position in her grasp, every door opening before her, the sweetness of having her genius recognized. One blow, and the spreading tree is dead. At the call of duty the young woman struck it without repining, and saw the whole scene change at once. Obloquy and hard work ill-paid; almost every door shut against her, the name she had made a talisman turned to a reproach, and life henceforth a sacrifice. How serenely she took up that cross, how bravely she bore it almost till life's close!<sup>1</sup>

The modest volume which caused all the difficulties was dedicated to the Reverend Samuel J. May of Brooklyn, Connecticut, whom Bronson Alcott called "The Lord's Chere Boy," and whom Whittier described as a sunny-faced young man, "in whom all the beautitudes seemed to find expression, mingling in his veins the best blood of the Sewall's and Quinoys; a man so exceptionally pure and large-hearted, so genial, tender and loving, that he could be faithful to truth and duty without making an enemy."<sup>2</sup> The dedication was made as a mark of gratitude "for his earnest and disinterested efforts in an unpopular but most righteous cause."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 264

<sup>2</sup>Whittier, Works, VII, p. 176

<sup>3</sup>Child, An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans, Dedication

The book proper opens with a consideration of a brief history of Negro slavery and its inevitable effect upon all concerned with it. Beginning with the Portuguese exploration in Africa in 1442, and continuing through the cruelties of the Middle Passage, each phase of slavery is considered in a factual manner. Here are no diatribes such as those of William Lloyd Garrison, or appeals to sympathy as in Uncle Tom, but a plain exposition of documented facts, stated with all the effectiveness of a master propagandist. Comparative views of slavery in different ages and nations, including the true aspects of contemporary slavery in the United States, are set forth in distinct propositions, each of which is discussed and substantiated by existing laws. Free labor is contrasted with slave labor in order to show that slavery is inconsistent with economy whether domestic or political. The possibility of safe emancipation is examined and approved, but there is no evidence that there is a sincere desire for it at the present time. The advocates of slavery remind Maria Child of a comparison, "Even thus does a dog, unwilling to follow his master's carriage, bite the wheels, in a vain effort to stop its progress."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most interesting chapters exposes the fallacy of the Colonization Society. This society was formed in 1817 in Washington. Its purpose was gradually to remove all the Negroes from the United States. Mrs. Child objects to the society on the basis that, "it tends to put public opinion asleep" to the horrors of slavery and in the then more than fifteen years of its operation:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 104

has transported between two and three thousand free people of color. There are in the United States two million slaves and three hundred thousand free blacks; and their numbers are increasing at the rate of seventy thousand annually. While the Society has removed less than three thousand, - five hundred thousand have been born. While one hundred and fifty free blacks have been sent to Africa in a year, two hundred slaves have been born in a day. To keep the evil just where it is, seventy thousand a year must be transported. How many ships, and how many millions of money, would it require to do this? It would bankrupt the treasury of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Maria Child's praise of the "Immediate Abolitionists" was clear, and her defense of them was impregnable. She digresses to express disapproval of educational and social discriminations against Negroes.

In Brazil, people of color are lawyers, clergymen, merchants and military officers.

Maria Child feels keenly that it is unchristian to:

allow a prejudice to prevent the improvement of a large portion of the human race, and interfere with what all civilized nations considered the most common rights of mankind? It cannot be that my enlightened and generous countrymen will sanction anything so narrow-minded and so selfish.<sup>2</sup>

Socially the United States is, she feels, far less developed than is England. "If a respectable colored person enters a church there (in England) the pews are readily opened to him; if he appears at an inn, room is made for him at the table, and no laughter, or winking, reminds him that he belongs to an outcast race." Here Mrs. Child tells the story of "a negro who was sold into West Indian Slavery by his New

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 128

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 135



England master. The unfortunate negro gains his freedom by the kindness of an individual, and has now a handsome little property and the command of a vessel ."<sup>1</sup>

The membership of the Colonization Society is made up of:

a great variety of character and opinions. Many of them believe the ultimate tendency of the Society to be very different from what it really is. Some slave-owners encourage it because they think it cannot decrease slavery, and will keep back the inconvenient crisis when free labor will be cheaper than slave labor; others of the same class join it because they really want to do some act of kindness to the unfortunate African race, and all the country insist upon it that this is the only way; some politicians in the free States countenance it from similar motives; and because less cautious measures might occasion a loss of Southern votes and influence; the time-serving class - so numerous in every community, - who are always ready to flatter existing prejudices, and sail smoothly along the current of popular favor, join it, of course.<sup>2</sup>

With her usual fairness Mrs. Child adds:

I am willing to believe that the largest proportion belong to it, because they have compassionate hearts, are fearful of injuring the Southern brethren, and really think there is no other way of doing so much good to the Negroes. With this last mentioned class, I sympathize in feeling, but differ in opinion.<sup>3</sup>

The alternative offered by Mrs. Child is the Anti-Slavery Society, formed in January, 1832. Immediate Emancipation was not the end of this Society's ambitions, but as distinctly stated in Article Two of its Constitution:

The objects of the Society shall be, to endeavor by all means sanctioned by law, humanity and religion, to effect the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 134

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 137

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 138

abolition of slavery in the United States; to improve the character and condition of the free people of color, to inform and correct public opinion in relation to their situation and rights, and obtain for them equal civil and political rights and privileges with the whites.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Child acknowledges with shame that she once had a very strong prejudice against abolition, "but a candid examination," perhaps suggested by her husband, convinced her that she was in error. Having been convinced of the rightness of the movement, she defends the society against accusations of being "seditious, fanatical, and likely to promote insurrections,"<sup>2</sup> and realizes that if insurrections do occur, they will "no doubt be attributed to the Anti-Slavery Society." This fallacy is answered with the facts that insurrections did occur in the West Indies long before the English Abolitionists began their efforts and that "masters were murdered in this country before the Anti-Slavery Society was thought of."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1830's an apology for slavery and personal prejudice often set forth is the intellectual inferiority of the Negro. The absurdity of this position is proved by the superior condition of this people in ancient times, together with the present character of the people in the interior of Africa. Short biographies of Negroes, many of which are enlarged in the Freedmen's Book, are given to substantiate the fact of the Negro's intelligence. The examples show only the bright side of the picture.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 138

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 142

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 143

I readily grant it; but I have deemed it important to show that the picture has a bright side. Where at the present time, can they live in perfect freedom, cheered by the hopes and excited by the reward, which stimulate white men to exertion? Every avenue to distinction is closed to them. Even where the body is suffered to be free, a hateful prejudice keeps the soul in fetters. I think every candid mind must admit that it is more wonderful they have done so much, than that they have done no more.<sup>1</sup>

The moral character of slaves is defended on the basis of history and the unnatural circumstances.

How can purity be expected from him, who sees almost universal licentiousness prevail among those whom he is taught to regard as his superiors? Besides, we must remember how entirely unprotected the Negro is in his domestic relations, and how very frequently husband and wife are separated by the caprice, or avarice, of the white man. I have no doubt that slaves are artful, for they must be so... Try to judge the Negro by the same rules you judge other men; and while you condemn his faults, do not forget his manifold provocation.<sup>2</sup>

The concluding chapter of the volume deals with the social and intellectual problems of the free Negro. In 1833 actual slavery did not exist in New England, yet "the spirit of the hateful and mischievous thing"<sup>3</sup> was present in all its strength. The social position of the Negro in Massachusetts was regulated by statute.

In the first place, an unjust law exists in this Commonwealth, by which marriages between persons of different color is pronounced illegal.

While the children of:

honest, industrious individuals, who are merely guilty of differing from us in a matter of taste<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 171

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 192

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 195

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 197

cannot be legitimate, yet:

neither the legislature nor customs of slaveholding states exert their influence against immoral connexions... In one portion of our country this fact is shown in a very peculiar and striking manner. There is a numerous class at New-Orleans, called Quateroons or Quadroons, because their colored blood has for several successive generations been intermingled with the white. The women are much distinguished for personal beauty and gracefulness of motion; and their parents frequently send them to France for the advantages of an elegant education. White gentlemen of the first rank are desirous of being invited to their parties, and often become seriously in love with these fascinating but unfortunate beings. Prejudice forbids matrimony, but universal custom sanctions temporary connexions, to which a certain degree of respectability is allowed, on account of the peculiar situation of the parties. These attachments often continue for years - sometimes for life - and instances are not unfrequent of exemplary constancy and great propriety of deportment.<sup>1</sup>

"There is among colored people an increasing desire for information and laudable ambition to be respectable in manners and appearance."<sup>2</sup>

Yet in public schools colored children are:

subject to many discouragements and difficulties; and into the private schools they cannot gain admission... The attempt to establish a school for African girls at Canterbury, Connecticut, has made too much noise to need a detailed account. A colored girl, who availed herself of this opportunity to gain instruction, was warned out of town, and fined for not complying; and the instructress was imprisoned for persevering in her benevolent plan.<sup>3</sup>

Another attempt was made for Negro education in Connecticut, this time a school for boys at New Haven. This school was also ended by opposition. Such an attitude in fairness it must be admitted "would probably have

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 197

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 198

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 199. Prudence Crandall, a Quaker teacher, made this attempt to establish a school for Negro girls. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, p. 245

been manifested in Massachusetts, under like circumstances."<sup>1</sup> But fifty years hence, "the black laws of Connecticut will be a greater source of amusement to the antiquarian, than her famous blue laws."<sup>2</sup>

The exclusion of Negroes from public conveyances is condemned as a "ridiculous prejudice." Many examples of "inexcusable proceedings," for which no authority can be found in "religion, reason, or the laws,"<sup>3</sup> are given in graphic detail.

The unpopularity of the abolition cause is admitted by Mrs. Child.

Almost all great evils are resisted by individuals who directly suffer injustice or inconvenience from them; but it is a peculiar beauty of the abolition cause that its defenders enter the lists against wealth, and power, and talent, not to defend their own rights, but to protect weak and injured neighbors, who are not allowed to speak for themselves. Those who become interested in a cause laboring so heavily under the pressure of present unpopularity, must expect to be assailed by every form of bitterness and sophistry. At times, discouraged and heart-sick, they will perhaps begin to doubt whether there are in reality any unalterable principles of right and wrong. But let them cast aside the fear of man, and keep their minds fixed on a few of the simple, unchangeable laws of God, and they will certainly receive strength to contend with the adversary.<sup>4</sup>

Personalities are dealt with in a firm and independent spirit. Her defense of William Lloyd Garrison, the most eloquent as well as the most hated Abolitionist, who the following year was to be dragged to Boston Common with a rope around his neck, was in itself a courageous act. "Mr. Garrison is a disinterested, intelligent, and remarkably pure-minded man,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 200

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 200

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 203

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 209

whose only fault is that he cannot be moderate on a subject which it is exceedingly difficult for an honest mind to examine with calmness." Of this man who could state that the "Constitution was an agreement with Death and a covenant with Hell,"<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Child, with admirable control, comments:

Many who highly respect his character and motives, regret his tendency to use wholesale and unqualified expressions; but it is something to have the truth told, even if it be not in the mildest way, whoever fairly and dispassionately examines the question, will be more than disposed to forgive the occasional faults of an ardent temperant, in consideration of the difficulty of the undertaking, and the violence with which it has been opposed.<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate downfall of slavery, she insists, must come from:

the Union of individual influence which produces a vast amount of moral force, which is not the less powerful because it is often unperceived. A mere change in the direction of our efforts, without any increased exertion, would in the course of a few years, produce an entire revolution of public feeling. This slow but sure way of doing good is almost the only means by which benevolence can effect its purpose.<sup>3</sup>

This book is modest and factual. The purpose of publishing it as set forth by Mrs. Child answers the why of its publication. "I have put my mite into the treasury. The expectation of displeasing all classes has not been unaccompanied with pain. But it has been strongly impressed upon my mind that it was a duty to fulfill this task; and worldly considerations should never stifle the voice of Conscience."<sup>4</sup> This attitude

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 209

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 210

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 216

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 216

contrasts sharply with that attitude attributed to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe: "She was never one to ally herself uncompromisingly even in private communications with causes that were unpopular or dubious, however much she might secretly believe in them."<sup>1</sup> While the effect of the emotionalism of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom cannot be overestimated, yet the quiet informative Appeal brought powerful converts to the Anti-Slavery cause. Channing, Sumner, Higginson, and other prominent opponents of slavery, acknowledged its influence on them then and later.<sup>2</sup> Whittier said of this volume:

It is quite impossible for any one of the present generation to imagine the popular surprise and indignation which the book called forth, and how entirely the author cut herself off from the favor and sympathy of a large number of those who had previously delighted to do her honor. Social and literary circles, which had been proud of her presence, closed their doors against her. The sale of her books, the subscriptions to her magazine, fell off to a ruinous extent. She knew all she was hazarding, and made the great sacrifice, prepared for all the consequences which followed.<sup>3</sup>

Satisfaction in work well done and in firm friends, who gathered around her, meant much to her. On May 11, 1856, she wrote to Lucy Osgood from Wayland:

My Appeal in favor of anti-slavery, and attacking colonization, marched into the enemy's camp alone. It brought Dr. Channing to see me, for the first time; and he told me it had stirred up his mind to the conviction that he ought not to remain silent on the subject. Then came Dr. Palfrey, who years afterward said that the emancipation of his slaves might be traced to the impulse that book had given him. Charles Sumner writes me that the influence of my anti-slavery writings years ago has had an important effect on his course in Congress.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert F. Wilson, Crusader in Crinolin, p. 196

<sup>2</sup>Dictionary of American Biography, IV, p. 67

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 261

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 77

The Southern reaction was violent. The book was called "ill-judged" by the editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, who classed Maria Child with the "madmen who are blindly jeopardizing the peace of the country and the lives of thousands. We cannot trust our feelings upon this subject; we see too clearly the horrors in perspective, which fanaticism is preparing for us."<sup>1</sup> In a sense that the Southern press could not at that time appreciate, this book, quiet and factual though it might be, was an immense force in that tide which flowed forth at Fort Sumter and ebbed at Appomattox. The Appeal was followed by numerous other appeals to the conscience of the nation, and she became one of the most effective, "though not immodestly aggressive figures in the greatest of modern crusades."<sup>2</sup>

Thenceforth her life was a battle; a constant rowing hard against the stream of popular prejudice and hatred. And through it all - pecuniary privation, loss of friends and position, the painfulness of being suddenly thrust from the 'still air of delightful studies' into the bitterest and sternest controversy of the age - she bore herself with patience, fortitude, and unshaken reliance upon the justice and ultimate triumph of the cause she had espoused.<sup>3</sup>

Thus she continued. Her pen was never idle. Volume after volume of anti-slavery writing came from her pen, although the many letters she received were personally abusive. One letter sent "postage double and unpaid" invited her to New Orleans and promised "a warm welcome and reception, and lodgings in the calaboose with as much nigger company"<sup>4</sup> as she might desire.

Once having joined the ranks, Maria Child soon became a leading member of the anti-slavery forces. She was ready to take her place regardless

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<sup>1</sup>Southern Literary Messenger, I, p. 651

<sup>2</sup>William A. Trent, A History of American Literature, P. 253

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. LX

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 41



of personal danger. The American abolition forces were greatly aided when in 1834, George Thompson, English abolitionist and champion of the triumphant conflict for West India emancipation, came to lecture in America. His coming to New York caused that city to take on the aspect of a battlefield. Into the fray went Mrs. Child. She wrote:

I am at Brooklyn, at the house of a very hospitable Englishman, a friend of Mr. Thompson's. I have not ventured into the city, nor does one of us dare to go to church today, so great is the excitement here. You can form no conception of it. 'Tis like the times of the French Revolution, when no man dared trust his neighbors. Private assassins from New Orleans are lurking at the corners of the streets, to stab Arthur Tappan; and very large sums are offered for anyone who will convey Mr. Thompson into the slave states.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing in the present what was to be understood by the many only in the distant future, Mrs. Child wrote, "*Prosperity* will marvel at the hardness of our prejudice on this subject, as we marvel at the learned and conscientious believers in the Salem witchcraft. So easy it is to see the errors of past ages, so difficult to acknowledge our own!"<sup>2</sup>

Convinced of the ultimate success of the cause which she had espoused, Maria Child refused the request of her brother that she use caution during these years of intense excitement. To him she answered:

You ask me to be prudent, and I will be so, as far as is consistent with a sense of duty; but this will not be what the world calls prudent. Firmness is the virtue most needed in times of excitement. What consequence is it if a few individuals do sink to untimely and dishonored graves, if the progress

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 15

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 12

of great principles is still onward? Perchance for this cause came we into the world. I have examined the history of the slave too thoroughly, and felt his wrongs too deeply, to be prudent in the wordly sense of the term. I know too well the cruel and wicked mockery contained in all the excuses and palliations of the system.<sup>1</sup>

The spirit of Maria Child was a fighting one, unlike that of Catherine Sedgwick, who "resisted her example and prudently refrained from putting forth any abolition material."<sup>2</sup>

That the abolitionists of this period needed physical as well as moral and intellectual courage is shown by her narrative of a Boston mob which gathered when George Thompson, English abolitionist, spoke in that city.<sup>3</sup> Her account describes the tension which arose on such occasions, and the actual physical violence which was threatened. Describing this particular instance to Whittier, Mrs. Child wrote:

My most vivid recollection of George Thompson is of his speaking at Julian Hall on a memorable occasion. Mr. Stetson, then keeper of the Tremont House, was present, with a large number of slaveholding guests, who had come to Boston to make their annual purchases of the merchants. Their presence seemed to inspire Mr. Thompson. Never, even from his eloquent lips, did I hear such scathing denunciations of slavery. The exasperated Southerners could not contain their wrath. Their lips were tightly compressed, their hands clinched, and now and then a muttered curse was audible. Finally, one of them shouted, 'If we had you down south, we'd cut off your ears.' Mr. Thompson folded his arms in his characteristic manner, looked calmly at the speaker, and replied, 'Well, sir, if you did cut off my ears, I should still cry aloud, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."'

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 17

<sup>2</sup>Sister Mary Michael Welsh, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Dissertation,

<sup>3</sup>Handbills passed about in Boston on October 21, 1835 show very clearly that the psychology of the mob prevailed. "That infamous foreign scoundrel, Thompson, will hold forth this afternoon, at the Liberator Office, No. 48 Washington Street. The present is a fair opportunity for the friends of the Union to snare Thompson out! It will be a contest between the Abolitionists and the friends of the Union. A purse of \$100 has been raised by a number of patriotic citizens to reward the individual who shall first lay violent hands on Thompson, so that he may be brought to the tar kettle before dark. Friends of the Union, be vigilant!"

Meanwhile my heart was thumping like a sledge-hammer, for, before the speaker began, Samuel J. May had come to me, and said in a very low tone, 'Do you see how the walls are lined by stout truckmen, brandishing their whips? They are part of a large mob around the entrance in Federal Street, employed by the Southerners to seize George Thompson and carry him to a South Carolina vessell in waiting at Long Wharf. A carriage with swift horses is at the door, and these Southerners are now exulting in the anticipation of lynching him. But behind that large green curtain at the back of the platform there is a door leading to the chamber of a warehouse. We have the key to that door, which leads to a rear entrance of the building on Milk Street. There the abolitionists have stationed a carriage with swift horses and a colored driver, who of course will do his best for George Thompson. Now, as soon as Mr. Thompson ceases speaking, we want antislavery women to gather round him and appear to detain him in eager conversation. He will listen and reply, but keep imperceptibly moving backward toward the green curtain. You will continue to stand close together, and appear to be still talking to him.'

At the close of the meeting twenty-five or thirty of us women gathered around Mr. Thompson and obeyed the instructions we had received. When he had disappeared from our midst there was quiet for two or three minutes, interrupted only by our busy talking. But the Southerners soon began to stand on tip-toe and survey the platform anxiously. Soon a loud oath was heard, accompanied by the exclamation, 'He's gone!' Then such a thundering stampede as there was down the front stairs I have never heard. We remained in the hall, and presently Samuel J. May came to us, so agitated that he was pale to the very lips. 'Thank God, he is saved!' he exclaimed; and we wrung his hands with hearts too full for speech.

The Boston newspaper press, as usual, presented a united front in sympathy with the slaveholders... But they were all in the dark concerning the manner of his escape; for as the door behind the curtain was known to very few, it remained a mystery to all except the abolitionists.<sup>1</sup>

Although personally active at Abolitionist meetings, Mrs. Child devoted her energies to writing volume after volume of anti-slavery materials. Between 1833 and 1836 she wrote four such volumes. The first was The Oasis,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Thomas W. Higginson, John Greenleaf Whittier, pp. 59-61

a gift book, published by E. C. Bacon of Boston in 1834. The editor contributed nineteen articles. Always sharing the anti-slavery sentiments of his wife, Mr. Child prepared three papers for the volume. One of Mr. Child's articles, "Decision in the Slave States," deals with slavery as a domestic problem. The remaining two are concerned with slavery in the British possessions. He was well informed on this subject and delivered an oration in honor of "Universal Emancipation in the British Empire" on August 1, 1834.<sup>1</sup> The poet Whittier<sup>2</sup> and his sister, Elizabeth, each contributed an article on the horrors of the Middle Passage. The Reverend Samuel May wrote of Miss Prudence Crandall's attempt to admit Negro girls to her school in Connecticut.<sup>3</sup> Much of the volume is made up of stories by Negro writers, to whose work Mrs. Child was always receptive.

In 1835 Mrs. Child published Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery anonymously in volume fifty-seven of the Markhoe pamphlets. The publisher's notice in Evils of Slavery the following year lists the Authentic Anecdotes under the works of Mrs. Child. It is a small volume which relates the most horrifying incidents of slave life. While the subject matter has a certain melodramatic quality, its objective style redeems it. There is

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<sup>1</sup>David Child, Oration in Honor of the Universal Emancipation in the British Empire. Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1834

<sup>2</sup>Whittier's contribution was "The Slave Ships" which was reprinted in the "Liberator", III, 24

<sup>3</sup>Miss Prudence Crandall had been arrested and imprisoned in Brooklyn, Connecticut for admitting Negro girls to her school.

no sentimental appeal such as contributed much to the success of Mrs. Stowe's famous novel. Mrs. Child's method was shrewd propaganda which offered precise, well-documented facts and allowed the reader to judge the right.

The Anti-Slavery Catechism and The Evils of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery were published in 1836. Having been actively engaged in anti-slavery work, Mrs. Child must have often been asked many questions concerning the movement. No doubt these questions soon took on a pattern. To answer them Mrs. Child published The Anti-Slavery Catechism. Written in the form of answers to questions most frequently asked by those interested in the cause of the slave, the volume had an immediate success. It retained this popularity, for a second edition followed in 1839.

The Evils of Slavery and the Cure of Slavery took the battle into the Southern ranks, for the evils were related by the opinions of Southerners themselves as expressed in their own words. The cure of slavery is based on historical evidence of the success of such emancipation within the British Empire. The second section of the volume expresses the opinions held by Mr. Child, who remained vitally interested in this question.

These volumes are quiet and factual, as are all Mrs. Child's abolitionist writings. They are clear and sensible propaganda of the highest type. Personally devoted to the cause of the slave, Mrs. Child was able to write with a quiet objectivity which added force to her arguments.

Mrs. Child was no mere theorist. Hers was a practical humanitarianism. In 1836 she concerned herself with a little child, supposed to be a slave.

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This child had been brought North from New Orleans and was kept shut up at No. 21 Pinckney Street in Boston. With these few facts Mrs. Child went into action. As usual, her approach was calm and methodical. The first act was to attempt to persuade the child's mistress to leave the child at the colored asylum. Failure in this was to be expected. Therefore it was necessary to begin activities which were similar to those so successfully carried on by Isaac Hopper, a Philadelphia Quaker who devoted his life to the service of the unfortunate. The identity of the child was established by a method which is not disclosed. Mrs. Child wrote to Mr. Edward Carpenter, "I will not fill this sheet with particulars. Suffice it to say, the way was opened for us. We obtained all the evidence we wanted, carried it to a lawyer, who petitioned for a writ of habeas corpus; the judge granted the petition; and the man who held little Med in custody was brought up for trial... Finally the judges decided unanimously in favor of Med and liberty!"<sup>1</sup>

The hostile attitude of the press is shown in the article from the Commercial Gazette, in which the editor wrote, "This decision though unquestionably according to law is much to be regretted; for such cases cannot but injure the custom of our hotels, now so liberally patronized by gentlemen from the South."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 20

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 20

With her usual frankness Maria Child gives her opinion of the editor, "Verily, Sir Editor, thou art an honest devil; and I thank thee for not being at the pains to conceal thy cloven feet."<sup>1</sup>

In New York, Mrs. Child again found herself in difficulties concerning a fugitive slave. In 1846 she published an article in the Courier. She wrote to her brother the rather amusing results of that article.

The pious press is exceedingly shocked because I called him 'a living gospel of freedom, bound in black.' It is so blasphemous to call a man a gospel! The Democratic papers accused me of trying to influence the state election then pending. The fun of it is, that I did not know there was an election. I could not possibly have told whether that event takes place in spring or fall. I have never known anything about it since I was a little girl on the lookout for election cake. I know much better who leads the orchestras than who governs the state.<sup>2</sup>

These incidents took place before the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law. The passing of that law did not change Maria Child's opinion in the naturalness of each man's desire to be free. Her opinion of this law never changed. In 1861 she wrote to a friend, Lucy Sears:

Law is not law, if it violates principles of eternal justice. If drunken foreigners are hired to vote for a member of Congress, and the vote of that member causes the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, probably because he wishes to obtain some still higher office, am I bound to sell my soul to perdition because the iniquity has been framed into a law?<sup>3</sup>

In 1852 Thomas Sims, a fugitive slave, was surrendered in Boston. No longer able to seek a slave's freedom by legal means, Mrs. Child still "swore 'By the Eternal,' that as Massachusetts had sent him into slavery, Massachusetts should bring him back."<sup>4</sup> Her future determination is recalled in a letter to her friend, Mrs. S. B. Shaw:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 20

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 58

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 153

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 144

I resolved, also, that it should all be done with pro-slavery money. They told me that I had undertaken to 'hoe a very hard row.' I expected to have to write at least a hundred letters, and to have to station myself on the steps of the State House this winter to besiege people. Sims is a skillful mechanic and his master asks \$1,800 for him. A large sum for an abolitionist to get out of pro-slavery purses! But I got it! I got it! I got it! Hurrah! I had written only eighteen letters, when one gentlemen promised to pay the whole sum, provided I would not mention his name.<sup>1</sup>

When the war was over, and slavery abolished, Mrs. Child wrote a postscript to the case, when she informed her friend, Mrs. Shaw, of the identity of the person who had paid the full sum to redeem Thomas Sims.

It was Major-General Charles Devens, who was United States marshal at the time of the rendition of Sims. He made the offer unasked; and when Sims found his way North again, he sent him, through me, one hundred dollars to assist him till he could get into business. It seems to me a singularly noble proceeding. I suppose that his idea of the necessity of sustaining law, and his great admiration of Daniel Webster, led him to do what pained his heart at the time and troubled his conscience afterwards. But, you would rarely find a man who would atone so nobly for an error.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Maria Child served the cause of the individual as well as that of a race repressed.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 144

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 139



## 2. Return to Creative Writing

In the midst of her intense preoccupation with the intricacies of the Abolition movement, Mrs. Child must have turned with a sense of escape to the writing of Philothea. This novel first published in 1836 is a curious combination of melodrama and sincere writing. It is a "gentle, ignorant romance of the Athens of Pericles."<sup>1</sup> This Grecian Romance, "in which a New England maiden in a peplus tries to reform Aspasia,"<sup>2</sup> is not entirely successful. It would be indeed too much to expect that any but a profound classical scholar could portray this most brilliant period in the history of Athens. In order to realistically present this age when the master statesmanship of Pericles brought him the applause of the populace, when students flocked to hear the teaching of Plato, when the statuary of Phidias was as renowned as the fame of the gods it personified, when the celebrated Aspasia "succeeded admirably in pleasing the good taste of the Athenians, which she ministered to their vanity and their vices;"<sup>3</sup> a deep understanding of classical antiquity must be combined with a critical genius and an objective style.

After the initial shock of having Anaxagoras and Plato converse together, it becomes apparent that in preparation for this volume Mrs. Child had done much reading in classical authors. The dialogue of Plato and

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<sup>1</sup>The Cambridge History of American Literature, I, p. 319

<sup>2</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 189

<sup>3</sup>Lydia Child, Philothea, p. 20

the oratory of Pericles are used extensively. Customs of the age are intelligently integrated into the story. Grecian terms are used extensively and with accuracy, yet the spirit of the age in some measure escapes her. The style in which it is written is imaginative, showing sensitivity to beauty in nature and the works of man.

The choice of period is in keeping with the writings of the decade which felt that America had no romantic past and to write of the ideal necessitated going back to the distant past.

In the preface to this volume Mrs. Child wrote:

The practical tendencies of the age, and particularly of the country in which I lived, have so continually forced me into the actual, that my mind has seldom obtained freedom to rise into the ideal. The hope of extended usefulness has hitherto induced a strong effort to throw myself into the spirit of the times; which is prone to neglect beautiful and fragrant flowers, unless their roots will answer for vegetables, and their leaves for herbs.<sup>1</sup>

In the creation of Philothea, the heroine of this novel, we have a woman of high moral principles unwilling to be turned from her convictions by the persuasiveness of Aspasia or the power of Pericles. When reluctantly and heavily veiled as became a maiden of Athens, Philothea accompanies her grandfather, Anacogras, to the residence of Aspasia, she was charmed by the beauty which abounded, yet spoke words of bold admonition against the ambition and sophistry of her hostess. The character of Philothea is very close to the Bostonian propriety of the nineteenth century. Ever destined to speak the truthful, rather than perhaps the more tactful word, she entreats Aspasia, "You have unbounded influence - use it nobly! No longer seek popularity by flattering the vanity, or

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Preface

ministering to the passions of the Athenians. Let young men hear the praise of virtue from the lips of beauty... Oh, lady, never, never, had any mortal such power to do good!"<sup>1</sup> This straightforward sincerity and uncompromising integrity are characteristic of Philothea throughout her story. As a foil to Philothea, Eudora, a slave, whom Phidias, the sculptor, had purchased in her early childhood and trained up in his own household, brings out the evils of Athenian society. Parallel love stories serve as the structure on which Maria Child builds this moralizing romance.

The novel carries many of the embellishments of the sentimental novel. Flowers and the language of flowers are understood by all. Pericles raises a rose for silence, when Aspasia speaks without caution.<sup>2</sup> The garlands presented by Plato during the festivities were suited to the nature and accomplishments of each recipient.<sup>3</sup> The innocence of childhood is a favorite idea of Mrs. Child. Throughout the novel such expressions abound. "It is good for us to keep near our childhood. In leaving it, we wander from the gods,"<sup>4</sup> Philothea tells the courtesan, Aspasia. Religion was a major concern of the writer of the sentimental novel. This religion was of a personal and intuitive nature. It would, however, have without doubt startled the sophist Aspasia to have Philothea reassure her of a future existence with the facile solution, "Lady, the simple fact that the human

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 34

soul has ever thought of another world, is sufficient proof that there is one; for how can an idea be formed by mortals, unless it has first existed in the divine mind?"<sup>1</sup>

Philothea is a moral New England dream of Greece in the days of Pericles, Plato, Anaxagores, and Phidias, an "ideal picture of Greek life, steeped in the purity of its author's soul."<sup>2</sup> The descriptions of the beauties of Athens are one of its charms. Maria Child loved beauty. Describing the statuary, colors of the robes and the elaborate interiors, gives full scope to her not inconsiderable powers of description. Weakness is shown in the historical portions of the book. The horror of the plague in Athens and the elaborateness of the trial of Pericles are only sketchily presented. The characters seem on the whole accurate. Plato speaks as in his dialogues, yet the selection of sentiments is such that Plato emerges only as a sweet lovable individual beloved children. "By dwelling on the mystical doctrines of the philosopher to the exclusion of his practical traits,"<sup>3</sup> the author wanders from her usual close adherence to history. The love stories constitute the anachronistic elements of the book. Alcibiades is but a bogged Robert Lovelace, while the abduction of Eudora too closely resembles the awkwardly melodramatic seduction of Charlotte Temple.

To Lowell, the author was and remained "Philothea," for it is as such he wrote the most charming sketch ever made of Maria Child:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 92

<sup>2</sup>Trent, A History of American Literature, p. 254

<sup>3</sup>Evert A. & George L. Duyokinck, Cyclopaedia of American Literature, p. 388

There comes Philothea, her face all aglow;  
 She has just been dividing some poor creature's woe,  
 And can't tell which pleases her most - to relieve  
 His want, or his story to hear and believe.<sup>1</sup>

It was perhaps the tranquil spirit within Mrs. Child as manifested in this novel, which caused Edgar Allan Poe to write, "We turn to these pure and quiet pages with that species of grasping satisfaction with which a drowning man clutches the shore."<sup>2</sup> With considerable extravagance he further praises its style as a model for "purity, chastity, and ease,"<sup>3</sup>

Philothea was the first attempt of Maria Child to return to the field of fiction from the ranks of the Abolitionists. Although she published in Mrs. S.J. Hale's Lady's Magazine, that editor criticized her in the "Woman's Record" for "wasting her soul's wealth" in the service of the most unpopular cause, and while recognizing the beauties of Philothea, stressed the fact that in "doing incalculable injury to humanity" she has engendered bitter feelings which have "prevented the merits of this remarkable book from being appreciated as they deserve." It is indeed remarkable that by her own volition, having cut herself off from a large segment of her reading public, this gentle romance yet ran through three editions. Contemporary criticism deemed this volume "the most elaborate and successful of the author's productions."<sup>4</sup> Literary success, however, meant but little to Maria Child, as she wrote to her brother:

I am very glad that you liked Philothea, and that the dedication pleased you. Among my personal friends the book has proved far more of a favorite than I had supposed it would. I have

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Pageant of America, II, p. 210

<sup>2</sup>Poe, op. cit., p. 99

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 99

<sup>4</sup>Duyckinck, op. cit., p. 388

heard the echo of newspaper praise, but have not in fact seen a single notice of Philothea. For my own sake, I care less about literary success than I could easily make people believe; but I am glad if this work adds to my reputation, because it will help to increase my influence in the anti-slavery cause. It will be another mite added to the widow's fund for the treasury of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that she attempted such a novel surprised even her. In June of 1838 she wrote with feeling to her brother:

If I possessed your knowledge, it seems to me as if I could move the whole world. I am often assured and surprised to think how many things I have attempted to do with my scanty stock of learning. I know not how it is, but my natural temperament is such that when I wish to do anything I seem to have the instinctive faith that I can do it; whether it be cutting and making a garment, or writing a Greek novel.<sup>2</sup>

Modest though the author might be, it must have served to gratify her to hear "the echo" of unstinted praise of the North American Review. "Every page of it breathes the inspiration of genius, and shows a highly cultivated taste in literature and art."<sup>3</sup> Even more gratifying must have been Whittier's tribute, "How few American books can compare with thy 'Philothea'!"<sup>4</sup>

The success of Philothea might well have encouraged Mrs. Child to continue this imaginative type of literature, but at this time David Child took upon himself a task for which he was completely unfitted except for unbounded optimism and a sincere desire to speed the end of slavery.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 21

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Publisher's Blurb, Letters from New York, p. 7

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Thomas W. Higginson, John Greenleaf Whittier, p. 90

### 3. Life in Northampton and New York

After the annexation of the Louisiana Purchase, cane sugar and its profits became one of the economic factors in the continuation of slavery. Substitutes for cane sugar were eagerly sought by those who ardently wished to help the slave. Under the reign of Napoleon beet sugar had been a profitable industry in France, but no such attempt had been tried in America. The only beet sugar root which was ever sent to America was that sent by Joel Barlow.<sup>1</sup> A fund was set up by the Abolition Society to send a representative to Europe in 1836 to study the industry in France, Belgium and Germany. Who was better prepared to undertake this phase of the project than David Child, a scholar well acquainted with Europe and its languages? Temperamentally Mr. Child was well fitted for the assignment. With "shield and helmet" he set forth, but an embarrassment occurred at the dock, for Mr. Child was, at the very outset of his journey, arrested for an old debt. His energetic wife, with just a moment's hesitation when for once her spirits failed her, comforted him in prison and found friends to effect his release. Once free, David Child started on his journey, which was to mean eighteen long months of separation for this devoted couple. He read extensively on the subject and visited sugar factories throughout Europe. Finally he was ready to demonstrate the practicability of raising beet sugar in America. Back in the United States, David Child decided that the Connecticut River Valley was best suited for this experiment. To the little agricultural community of Northampton,

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<sup>1</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The World of Washington Irving, p. 74

Massachusetts, to reside in "a sort of shanty with two rooms and a garret," went David Child and with him his ever dutiful wife. Devoted as was Maria Child to the cause which they were attempting to forward, Northampton depressed her. "If I were to choose my home," she wrote to her brother, "I certainly would not place it in the Valley of the Connecticut. It is true, the river is broad and clear, the hills majestic, and the whole aspect of outward nature most lovely. But oh! the narrowness, the bigotry of man!"<sup>1</sup> This lack of intellectual companionship, together with endless household drudgery, made the years she spent in Northampton most unhappy ones. After her arrival in Northampton in May of 1838, a month elapsed before she stepped into the woods which were blooming with flowers. For one who loved nature in all her aspects, this was proof of the hours spent in uncongenial housework. A pathetic eagerness for intellectual companionship is shown in a letter to Mrs. Ellis Gray Loring, in which she tells of a visit from John Dwight. "I left my work in the midst, and sat down with a dirty gown and hands somewhat grimed, we were high up in the blue in fifteen minutes. I promised to take a flight with him from the wash-tub or dish-kettle any time..."<sup>2</sup>

The conflict produced by the need for a poetic outlet in the midst of prosaic difficulties is expressed in a letter to Augusta King in November of 1840. "...I stand between 'two infinities and three immensities' as Carlyle says (the two infinities being cooking done and to be done, and the three immensities being making, mending, and washing), if this won't drive poetry out of a mortal, I know not what will."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 33

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 28

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 37



Her courage returned and in January she was able to chide her brother gently for his concern. "The outward," she wrote, "has no power over us but that which we voluntarily give it. It is not I who drudge, it is merely the case containing me. I defy all the powers of earth and hell to make me scour floors and feed pigs, if I choose meanwhile to be off conversing with the angels." To her brother's concern for her religious state, Mrs. Child answered:

You are right, my dear brother, to attribute such freshness as I have to a vivid religious sentiment and not to a theological tenet. If I can in quietude and cheerfulness forego my own pleasure and relinquish my own tastes, to administer to my father's daily comfort, I see to those who live in shadows to be cooking food or mixing medicines; but I am in fact making divine works of art, which will reveal to me their fair proportions in the far eternity. If I can smother the rising anger, and melt wrath with love, I have written a glorious piece of music, to be sung in my 'Father's house of many mansions.' Nay, more perhaps I am doing somewhat to make a holier music descend to this world, first in purified affections, and ultimately in written notes. In this view of the ever-active agency of spirit; how appalling is the responsibility of a human soul; how glorious its capabilities. Another means of keeping my soul fresh is my intense love of Nature.<sup>1</sup>

Although the neighbors might be concerned with theological jargon and stories of "vessels that were wrecked, or shattered, or delayed on their passage, because they sailed on Sunday!" Mrs. Child was not discouraged, but with the aid of her husband in "that most odious of all tasks, that of getting signatures to petitions," they "resolved that the business shall be done in this town more thoroughly than it has been heretofore." The difficulty of the task may be judged by Mrs. Child's comment, "But, 'O Lord, sir!'"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 62

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33

The beauties of nature, of which she was ever conscious, surrounded Mrs. Child during her stay in Northampton, yet these were lonely years during which she was conscious that regardless of the success of the experiment, no possible financial reward would come to the household. White-washing a shanty, maintaining it as a home with no domestic help, half burying this unattractive house in flowers grown from seed she brought from Cottage Place where, she wrote, "I spent the happiest years of my life,"<sup>1</sup> Maria Child spent three years made bearable only because she and her husband were furthering a cause to which they were completely devoted.

The experiment, though proving the practicality of raising beet sugar in America, was not on a sufficient scale to be financially successful, yet the Culture of the Beet, and Manufacture of Beet Sugar, published by David Child in 1840, was awarded a premium by the Massachusetts Agricultural Society. The scientific success of this excellent volume unfortunately did not bring commensurate financial returns. It was therefore necessary that some means of support be found.

In this period of financial need, during the spring of 1841, Mr. Child was invited to edit the Anti-Slavery Standard in New York. Since he was deeply engrossed in the Northampton experiment, it was decided that Mrs. Child would accept the position. Only desperation concerning their financial condition and a realization that if a living were to be made she must take an active part, reconciled her to this separation. The Atlantic Monthly ventures the statement that "the separation gave rise naturally to ill-natured talk."<sup>2</sup> In the minds of many, such an action would, in 1841, be

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 41

<sup>2</sup>Atlantic Monthly, L, p. 841

interpreted as based on marital strife. Ample scope for speculation could be found in the fact that leaving her husband in Northampton, Maria Child went to New York where she engaged in the unseemly task of editing the weekly National Anti-Slavery Standard established by the Anti-Slavery Society during the previous year in order to spread the Abolitionist doctrine. The gossip, for such it was, is effectively silenced by Mrs. Child's letters during this period. To her brother she wrote, "My domestic attachments are so strong, and David is always so full of cheerful tenderness, that this separation is dreary indeed."<sup>1</sup> If this be not sufficient to put a stop to any malicious rumors, the following letter to Mrs. Pierce should serve that purpose:

My task here is irksome to me. Your father will tell you that it was not zeal for the cause, but love for my husband, which brought me hither. But since it was necessary for me to leave home to be earning somewhat, I am thankful that my work is for the anti-slavery cause. I have agreed to stay one year. I hope I shall then be able to return to my husband and rural home, which is humble enough, but very satisfactory to me. Should the Standard be continued and my editing generally desired, perhaps I could make an arrangement to send articles from Northampton. At all events I trust this weary separation from my husband is not to last more than a year. If I must be away from him, I could not be more happily situated than in Friend Hopper's family. They treat me the same as a daughter and a sister.<sup>2</sup>

The National Anti-Slavery Standard was a weekly paper established in 1840 by the Anti-Slavery Society. The advanced thinking of this group is apparent from the fact that it was willing to accept a woman editor. In his welcoming article the editor wrote:

We greatly rejoice...not merely that we have had extraordinary ability and faithfulness enlisted, and her reputation enlisted in the cause - but that they come to our aid in the form of woman.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 41

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41

It will, we anticipate, prove an ear in our enterprise. Woman has spoken and written in the anti-slavery service, but this is, we believe, her first assumption of the editorial chair in this great movement.<sup>1</sup>

Maria Child's answer in her first editorial is plain almost to the point of bluntness.

I am heartily obliged to brother Rogers, for his friendly greetings and cordial welcome... In answer to his wish, that I should on this occasion 'forget every incident of my existence, except my humanity,' I merely reply that I would he, too, had forgotten all else. Had Mr. Child's business made it possible for him to remove to New York, his experience in editing, his close observation of public affairs, and the general character of his mind, would have made it far better for the cause to have him for a resident, and myself for an assistant editor, but in any other point of view, it is quite unimportant that the arrangement is reversed."<sup>2</sup>

In this manner did Maria Child express her displeasure in the distinction made of her sex while, as usual, she praised her husband, whose intellect she most admired and on whom she depended for the factual quality of her writing.

She professed to find herself a "black sheep" among the newspaper writers and editors of her day. Booksellers courtesies, club libraries and other sources of information open to members of her profession were closed to her. It was only with great difficulty that she was able to continue this work for a period of three years.

The success of her editorship cannot be doubted. The high praise bestowed upon her by Wendell Phillips was heartfelt. In February of 1842 he entreated Mrs. Child to remain with the Standard and highly praised her work as editor.

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<sup>1</sup>National Anti-Slavery Standard, II, p. 164

<sup>2</sup>National Anti-Slavery Standard, II, p. 183

We all do appreciate the self-denial and effort which the Standard costs you, and sympathize with the discouragements; but if to know that all classes here, the ultra, the moderate, the half converted, the zealous, the indifferent, the active, all welcome the Standard, and that it is fast changing them all into its own likeness of sound, liberal, generous, active devoted men and women, without partiality and without hypocrisy - without sham - sifting out and building up - making a way for itself where no path was open before - ...that it seems as if the keystone were gone when we think of you leaving - why do cheer up and stay, were it only, woman, that those who think like you may have, in you, their due influence in the cause. Have not you and we souls and right to be heard?<sup>1</sup>

During the years in New York Maria Child not only carried on the editorship of a national paper, writing the greater part of it herself, but began, in 1841, the still interesting "Letters from New York," which appeared in the Boston Courier, then edited by Joseph T. Buckingham.

The letters created a literary sensation as they appeared. They were published twice a week. The counting-room of the Courier was filled by an eager crowd, half an hour before the proper time, on the days when they were expected. The paper came, damp from the press, and many a delicate glove bore traces of the fervor with which the owner had grasped the sheet. Men read it as they walked slowly up School Street. Young women ran to Munroe and Francis bookstore for their first glimpse. These letters were read aloud at the tea-table, and the next day everybody passed their bright saying along. And, when they were gathered into volumes, Junius himself never commanded a readier sale.<sup>2</sup>

The Letters were published in two series. The first edition of the Second Series tells of the reason for the title of the volume:

I do not call this volume Letters from New York on account of the unexpected popularity of the first volume, or because I consider it altogether appropriate; but I can think of no

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<sup>1</sup>Eleanor Lewis, "Letters of Wendell Phillips to Lydia Maria Child," New England Magazine, V, p. 731

<sup>2</sup>Unitarian Review, XIX, p. 526

better name, under which to arrange articles so miscellaneous and incongruous in their character. Many of them are now published for the first time, others have been scattered through various periodicals. I claim for them no other merit than that of being an honest record of my own views and impressions, on subjects which most interest me. If you discover faults in my premises, or errors in my conclusions, it may at least do you some good, by exciting your own mind to increased activity. That I see glorious truths in mere fragments, and utter even those with most inadequate expression, I am painfully conscious. But frankly and confidently, as children do, I show you an image of my soul, as reflected in the mirror of its passing thoughts. I have written nothing from affectation, sectarian prejudice, or partisan zeal. Perhaps you will forgive my deficiencies, for the sake of my kind intentions, and sincere love of truth.<sup>1</sup>

These letters are indeed "miscellaneous." "They contain tales, speculations, descriptions of passing events, and bring alternately tears and laughter, according to the varying moods of the writer."<sup>2</sup> Thomas Higginson praised them as the "precursors of that modern school of newspaper correspondence in which women have so large a share, and which has something of the charm of women's private letter, - a style of writing where description preponderates over argument and statistics make way for fancy and enthusiasm. Many have since followed in this path, and perhaps Mrs. Child's letters would not now be hailed as they then were. Others may have equaled her, but she gave us a new sensation, and that epoch was perhaps the climax of her purely literary career."<sup>3</sup>

New York in the 1840's was not the teeming metropolis of the twentieth century, yet to Maria Child it seemed "a place of hurry-scurry and there was something brutal in its life."<sup>4</sup> She was more at home "in the rural outskirts,

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia M. Child, Letters from New York, p. vii

<sup>2</sup>John S. Hart, The Female Prose Writers of America, p. 118

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 127

<sup>4</sup>Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 376

the charming villages on the New Jersey shore, the woody banks of Weehawken, a wild garden of early flowers."<sup>1</sup> Although nature as always appealed to her, there is throughout the Letters from New York a consciousness of the contrast between the kindness of nature and the inhumanity of man.

As we passed Blackwell's Island, I looked with thoughtful sadness on the handsome stone edifice erected there for a Lunatic Asylum. On another part of the island is a Penitentiary; likewise a noble building, though chilling the heart with its barred door and grated windows. The morally and the intellectually insane - should they not both be treated with kindness? It is a question for serious thought... There has at least been kindness evinced in the location chosen; for if free breezes, beautiful expanse of water, quiet, rural scenery and 'the blue sky that bends o'er all' can 'minister to the mind diseased,' then surely these forlorn outcasts of society may here find God's best physicians for their shattered nerves.<sup>2</sup>

City life had, Maria Child felt, a detrimental effect on man.

The enterprising, the curious, the reckless, and the criminal flock hither from all quarters of the world, as to a common centre, whence they can diverge at pleasure. Where men are little known, they are imperfectly restrained; therefore, great numbers live with somewhat of that wild license which prevails in time of pestilence. Life is a reckless game, and death is a business transaction. Warehouses of ready-made coffins stand beside warehouses of ready-made clothing, and the shroud is sold with spangled opera-dresses.<sup>3</sup>

The mania for speculation in this mal-formed society also distressed her with its appeal to young men who were deprived by city life of "the normal ranges of activity in simple environments."<sup>4</sup>

The author deplored the American tendency to ape European ways and to establish unwholesome class cleavage on the basis of money. She criticized

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 376

<sup>2</sup>Lydia M. Child, Letters from New York, 1st Series, p. 67

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 79

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 194

bitterly the contrast between the luxury of the wealthy and the desolation of the poor.

"These volumes from the point of view of the general student of literary history, are probably Mrs. Child's most valuable legacy."<sup>1</sup> "Really, a contribution to American Literature," wrote Margaret Fuller in the Dial. The lasting value is in a large measure due to the short stories which are included. Tales of former slaves, records of the Prison Association and incidents told by the author of her by friends were transformed by Mrs. Child into extremely popular short stories.

Charity Brown, a former slave, who did Mrs. Child's washing, told the author of her experiences as a slave. The years of slavery, although under a kind master, were bitter ones. On the death of her second master, Charity was "give free." The master's wife was, however, a "devil" and did not inform Charity. Finally, having gained some substance, Charity began her life long work of buying her sixteen children from slavery. The story is told in "precisely Charity's own words" for the author did not soon forget "the natural eloquence, or the spirit of Christian meekness and forbearance, which so beautifully characterized her expressions."<sup>2</sup>

From the records of the Prison Association Maria Child rewrote the story of the "Umbrella Girl," which she was to republish in the Life of Isaac Hopper. The tale was to lose none of its popularity by retelling. Now told as a Valentine story, it met the popular demand for a tale of seduction which included a moral. The purpose of publishing it is,

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel, p. 61

<sup>2</sup>Lydia M. Child, Letters from New York, First Series, p. 56



Mrs. Child wrote, "to exert a genial influence on the hearts of others; to do my mite toward teaching society how to cast out the Demon Penalty, by the voice of the Angel Love."<sup>1</sup>

The nineteenth century viewed prostitutes with a romantic pity which was evident in the stories of seduction so popular during the last decades of that century. Not so Mrs. Child - her concern was to seek the social and psychological causes which fostered this unfortunate group on society. Considering her lack of formal education and the undeveloped state of psychological understanding in her age, it is remarkable that she appreciated the childhood problems which led almost inevitably to the "frail sisterhood." The readers of the Columbian Magazine must have felt sympathy for the Elizabeth Wilson, who was hanged for infanticide. In childhood this unfortunate girl had been starved for affection by an undemonstrative father and a stepmother who completely lacked understanding. The seduction of this poor soul seemed inevitable when at last she was treated kindly by a stranger. Mrs. Child's understanding of the cause of crime led her to espouse the cause of one Amelia Norman. Margaret Fuller wrote of Mrs. Child's defense of that maligned woman:

The action and speech of this lady was of straightforward nobleness, undeterred by custom or cavil from duty toward an injured sister. She showed the case and the arguments the counsel against the prisoner had the assurance to use, in their true light to the public. She put the case on the only ground of religion and equity. She was successful in arresting the attention of many who had before shrugged their shoulders, and let sin pass as necessarily a part of the company of men. They begin to ask

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 75

whether virtue is not possible, perhaps necessary, to Man as well as to Woman. They begin to fear that the perdition of a woman must involve that of a man. This is a crisis. The results of this case will be important.<sup>1</sup>

One tale which was already a part of American folk-lore was retold by Maria Child on October 7, 1841. On that date she told the simple story of a young Yankee who visited the Emperor of Russia. As a gift he took to the Emperor an acorn from Mount Vernon. Apart from its appeal to American pride in Yankee self-reliance and ingenuity, this story has a charm which has resulted in its continued popularity. The last telling was by Walter D. Edmonds under the title of Tom Whipple.

Maria Child's way of life while she was thus reporting her thoughts on New York is told in a letter written in 1844.

I live in the same quiet, secluded way. I am never seen in public, and the question is sometimes asked, 'Where on earth does she pick up all she tells of New York in her letters to the Courier, for nobody ever sees her?' Willis saw my 'cap' though on one occasion. A bit of lace outside of my head was as much as I should expect him to see of me. I suppose you have seen his announcement to the public in what box I sat at Nible's; a fact doubtless of great importance to the public, fashionable and literary.<sup>2</sup>

Although she professed to attend no literary affairs, Edgar Allan Poe recorded meeting Mrs. Child at the home of Marcus Spring, "a New York merchant of literary proclivities."<sup>3</sup> There he saw Mrs. Child to whom he refers as "one of Spring's protegeses."<sup>4</sup> No doubt she went there with her life-long

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<sup>1</sup>Margaret Fuller, Women in the 19th Century, p. 148

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 56

<sup>3</sup>Hervey Allen, Israfel, II, p. 684

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 684

friend, Margaret Fuller, as she also attended the soirees of Miss Lynch, where the authors, artists, critics, wits and dilettanti forgathered. This was the group Poe christened the Literati, and about whom he published the volume by that name. Mrs. Child's friendship with Margaret Fuller was very close during this period, for it was at the home of Mrs. Child that Miss Fuller clandestinely met James Nathan during their unfortunate romance.

Thomas Higginson tells of the eagerness with which the Letters from New York were read.

I myself longed at time to out free from prescribed bondage, and not, in Lowell's later phrase, to 'pay so much of life for a living' as seemed to be expected. I longed anew, under the influence of George Sand and of Mrs. Child's Letters from New York, to put myself on more equal terms with that vast army of hand-workers who are ignorant of much that I knew, yet could do so much that I could not.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 77

#### 4. Return to Wayland

In 1852 Mrs. Child retired to Wayland, Massachusetts, to nurse her aging father. Wayland, about fifteen miles west of Boston, at that time was a typical secluded New England village with "quiet, grass-covered streets, heavily shaded by arching elms where little traffic disturbed its serenity... No railroad then disturbed the quiet. The only regular communication with the outside world was the old dusty yellow stage, with its four horses and creaking 'thorough braces' which made its daily leisurely progress through the shaded streets, bringing the mail and the one excitement of the day."<sup>1</sup>

Here in the quiet for which she had always longed, she cultivated her garden with assiduous care, which led a friend to say, "Mrs. Child took as much pleasure in covering up her flowers for the winter as some people do in making their children comfortable for the night."<sup>2</sup> The house was a small and unpretentious frame dwelling, a photograph of which is still in existence.<sup>3</sup> Even with the remodelling which has been carried on in the years since Mrs. Child's residence, the original dwelling is apparent. The east room, which was the quiet sitting-room from which the strong words of the author were to go forth in defense of oppressed humanity, is much the same today, with its low ceiling, fireplace and end door with the old latch still serving its purpose. Only the prisms in which she delighted are now missing.

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Cutting, Old Time Wayland, p. 3

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 411

<sup>3</sup>This photograph is in the house which is now owned by Mrs. Mary Harris.

This home was never a comfortable one, even for the standards of nineteenth century rural New England. To her dear friend, Mrs. Shaw, Maria Child wrote in the cold month of February 1868, telling her that she would be delighted to have a friend come for a visit, but explaining:

You could not be 'a burden' to me, if it were in my power to make you comfortable; but I regret to say that it is out of my power, at this inclement season. By taking all sorts of precautions, we keep one room warm, but the rest of the house is cold as a barn. Having procured a stove for the guest chamber, I thought I should be able to make you comfortable; if you should chance to come in winter; but, alas, nine times out of ten, the smoke rolls down the chimney, and fills the house, if I attempt to make a fire. I have tried very diligently, but cannot get it remedied, for love or money. We warm our night clothes and put them on by our sitting room fire, and then scamper up stairs, and plunge into bed as quick as possible, with a hot soap-stone at our feet.<sup>1</sup>

While this house was no doubt uncomfortable, it was a home to this devoted couple. After twenty-five years of married life, she wrote to her husband on the occasion of one of his rare absences:

My Dear Good David, Things remain much as when you left...How melancholy I felt when you went off in the morning darkness. It seemed as if everything about me was tumbling down; as if I never were to have a nest and a mate any more. Good, kind, generous, magnanimous soul! It almost made me cry to see how carefully you had arranged everything for my comfort before you went, - so much kindling stuff split up and the bricks piled up to protect my flowers.<sup>2</sup>

The great elm of their day is no more, but a beautiful fountain stands in perhaps the same spot where David Child:

laid the pipes and made a little fountain in his garden, with many a dissertation on the laws of hydraulics, and descriptions of famous fountains and aqueducts, to his friends who might come

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript letter, Wayland Public Library

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 86

to watch his work. When all this was done, he placed pretty colored sea shells in the basin, by which he and his wife would sit watching the ripple of the tiny shower, with the sun beams playing on the sand and shells; and great was Mrs. Child's delight when the birds discovered it, and made it their bath, spraying the flower beds with their little wings as they fluttered in the water.<sup>1</sup>

Wayland in the 1850's was indeed rural. The pleasures Maria Child enjoyed were simple but lasting. She wrote to her husband in response to one of his "charming love letters," written to her during a temporary separation:

You say you hope we had some drops of rain here. Such a storm as we had I have seldom witnessed. The day after you went away, there came one of those dreadful hurricanes of wind, smashing my flowers and tearing everything, right and left. I was in hopes it would go down with the sun, but it did not. Whenever I woke during the night I heard everything rocking and reeling. In the morning I went to look after the poor little sparrow in the rose bush, whom I had seen the day before, shutting her eyes hard and sticking to her nest, which was tossed about like a ship in a heavy gale. I wanted much to help her, but could not. Next morning I found the nest nearly wrenched from the bush and two of the eggs on the ground. They were still warm, so I replaced them, righted the nest and fastened it to the twig with strings. To my great surpriss she returned to her patient labor of incubation.<sup>2</sup>

While this was a secluded life, it was not an idle one. As usual Maria Child did her own housework with her usual efficiency, and the remainder of her time was devoted to the service of others. Her sympathy was catholic, going forth to the "common drunkard" of the town and to the oppressed of the nation.

Three years passed and she faced the loss of her father. Although ninety years of age and a man of some oddities, Mr. Francis was mentally hale and a beloved responsibility to his daughter, whose filial obligations

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<sup>1</sup>Cutting, op. cit., p. 42

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 96

were always a pleasure. At his death she was unconsolable. To Mrs. Shaw she wrote:

Yes, my beloved friend, the old man has gone home; and unless you had had such a charge for three years, you could not imagine how lonely and desolate I feel. Night and day he was on my mind, and now the occupation of my life seems gone. I have much work to do, both mental and manual; but as yet I cannot settle down to work. Always that dreary void! I went to Boston and spent four days; but the dreariness went with me. The old man loved me; and you know how foolishly my nature craves love... Always when I came back from Boston there was a bright firelight in his room for me, and his hand was eagerly stretched out, and the old face lighted up, as he said, 'You're welcome back, Maria.' This time, when I came home, it was all dark and silent. I almost cried myself blind, and thought I would willingly be fettered to his bedside for years, if I could only hear that voice again. This is weakness, I know. My spirits will doubtless rebound from the pressure as soon as I can fairly get to work.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually consolation came. In spring of that year she again wrote to Mrs. Shaw:

This winter has been the loneliest of my life. If you could know my situation you would pronounce it unendurable. I should have thought so myself if I had had a foreshadowing of it a few years ago. But the human mind can get acclimated to anything. What with constant occupation and the happy consciousness of sustaining and cheering my poor old father in his descent into the grave, I am almost always in a state of serene contentment.<sup>2</sup>

The seclusion of the life in Wayland suited her. She remained for twenty years, and much of her work was done there. After the death of her father, there were no ties to keep her in Wayland, for although her brother James lived nearby their natures were not sympathetic. "He was quite unlike his sister in politics, being an 'Old Line Democrat' of the Jefferson-Jacksonian stripe, and perhaps more pro- than anti-slavery. It is said

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 87

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 75

he used to declare that his sister's attitude on the slavery question had caused him much grief."<sup>1</sup>

There were many compensations for the quiet life she led. She was extremely busy with her books and the seclusion was just what she desired. "As her neighbors expressed it, 'She did not want much company, she was too busy to give her time to it; she came into town to be by herself.' So prevalent was this feeling among her neighbors and friends, and so well known was her wish in the matter, that but few people called."<sup>2</sup> That she valued this respect for her privacy is apparent from her disapproval of the coming of a railroad into Wayland. In expressing herself to a friend she one day exclaimed, "A railroad would be a nuisance, it would bring so much company from Boston. If we had a railroad to Wayland, the people would want to follow the Boston fashions."<sup>3</sup>

The general intelligence of the community made it an agreeable place for Maria Child. Among those who were her literary peers was Doctor Edmund H. Sears, then pastor of the Unitarian Church. An ardent abolitionist, Dr. Sears freely expressed his opinion from his pulpit.<sup>4</sup>

In the field of poetry Dr. Sears is known as the author of the well-known hymn beginning, "It came upon the midnight clear." When she compiled Looking toward Sunset Mrs. Child included his "Everlasting Youth" from Foregleams of Immortality, thus expressing her appreciation of his ability as a writer and her respect of him as a friend.

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<sup>1</sup>Hudson, op. cit., p. 407

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 406

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 406

<sup>4</sup>Cutting, op. cit., p. 34



The advanced state of culture in this village is shown by the fact that the second public library in America was established there. In 1860 there were only sixty-five libraries in the whole country, thus this village was most progressive. Maria Child's will left this library a fund of one hundred dollars. She may have contributed the complete set of her works, which is still a treasured item in this charming library.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually literary work reclaimed Maria Child and in 1854<sup>3</sup> she wrote the biography of Isaac Hopper, Quaker Abolitionist. In the preface of this volume she wrote:

Friend Hopper lived almost entirely for others; and it is a striking illustration of the fact, that I have often found it impossible to write his biography without having it consist largely of the adventures of other people.<sup>2</sup>

This is true of the volume, a prominent portion of which is composed of narratives and anecdotes of fugitive slaves based on Tales of Oppression published in various newspapers by the subject of the biography. Maria Child does not tell these tales in Mr. Hopper's words because, as she wrote:

I wished to present them in a more concise form, and partly because the principal actor could be spoken of more freely by a third person, than he could speak of himself. Moreover he had a more dramatic way of telling a story than he had of writing it; and I have tried to embody his unwritten style as nearly as I could remember it.<sup>3</sup>

An element of contemporary evaluation is introduced into this Preface in a comparison of facts:

which were continuously occurring within Friend Hopper's personal knowledge which corroborate the pictures of slavery drawn

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Hudson, The Annals of Sudbury, Wayland, and Maynard Middlesex County, Massachusetts, p. 102

<sup>2</sup>Lydia Child, Isaac Hopper, a True Life, p. v

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. vi

by Mrs. Stowe. Her descriptions are no more fictitious, than the narratives by Friend Hopper. She has taken living characters and facts of every-day occurrences, and combined them in a connected story, radiant with the light of genius, and warm with the glow of feeling.<sup>1</sup>

The strength of Mrs. Child's anti-slavery fervor and her faith in the ultimate success of this cause are nowhere expressed more strongly than in the close of this Preface:

Friend Hopper labored zealously for many, many years; and thousands have applied their best energies of head and heart to the same great work; yet the slave-power in this country is as strong as ever, - nay, stronger. Its car rolls on in triumph and priests and politicians outdo each other in zeal to draw it along, over its prostrate victims. But, lo! from under its crushing wheels, up rises the bleeding spectre of Uncle Tom, and all the world turns to look at him! Verily, the slave-power is strong; but God and truth are stronger.<sup>2</sup>

Isaac Hopper was an active and leading member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and as such was called upon to protect the rights of colored people. "He was likewise one of the overseers of a school for colored children, established by Anthony Benezet; and it was his constant practice, for several years, to teach two or three night every week, in a school for colored adults."<sup>3</sup>

Many examples are given of the shrewdness, courage, and zeal with which he fulfilled his mission as friend and legal adviser to colored people upon all emergencies.

One incident of Friend Hopper's aid to the unfortunate was re-told by Mrs. Child in a short story which had considerable contemporary popularity.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. vi

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. vii

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9

"The Umbrella Girl", "very handsome with glossy black hair, large beaming eyes, and 'lips like wet coral,'"<sup>1</sup> was found guilty of stealing a length of silk meant by her employer for the covering of umbrellas, to make a dress in order to impress an English traveller, Lord Henry Stuart. Having met his lordship at "that susceptible age when youth is ripening into womanhood,"<sup>2</sup> she was unaware of the nature of his advances until he "spoke more explicitly."<sup>3</sup> Since "the guileless young creature"<sup>4</sup> burst into tears at learning that "he was merely playing a game for temporary excitement," Lord Henry was convinced that she was "an innocent girl."<sup>5</sup> When she confessed that she had thought that he had intended to make her his wife, "he blushed and remained silent."<sup>6</sup> The theft of the silk was discovered and traced to her, and she was "arrested and dragged to prison."<sup>7</sup> Here Friend Hopper, as a member of the Prison Association, came to her aid. Having heard her story, he visited Henry, who excused himself by saying "he would not have tampered with the girl if he had known her to be virtuous."<sup>8</sup> "I have done many wrong things," he said, "but thank God, no betrayal of confiding innocence weighs on my conscience. I have always esteemed it the basest act of which man is capable."<sup>9</sup> With practical good sense Friend

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 229

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 230

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 231

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 231

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 230

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 232

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 233

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 235

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 235

Hopper secured one hundred dollars from Lord Henry, although the latter had offered him but fifty; thus the silk was paid for, and the girl was sent home to her mother well provided with clothing. Since on being arrested, "she had sufficient presence of mind to assume a false name, her true name had been kept from the newspapers... her name and residence forever remained a secret in the breast of her benefactor."<sup>1</sup> Years passed, and a "handsomely dressed matron with a blooming boy of five or six years"<sup>2</sup> visited Friend Hopper, and told him that she was the girl who had stolen the silk. Now married to "a highly respectable man, a senator in his native state,"<sup>3</sup> she earnestly invited him to visit her in her happy home. Instructing her son to "Look at that gentleman, and remember him well; for he was the best friend your mother ever had... She bade her benefactor farewell!"<sup>4</sup>

Such was the story re-told by Maria Child. Its sentimentality accounts for much of its contemporary popularity. It further shows her insistence on her early tenet that the moral of the story should be incorporated into the story and not "tacked on at the end."

Mrs. Child declares her abhorrence of war and conquest in comparing Friend Hopper with Napoleon, whom he "strongly resembled in character as well as appearance."<sup>5</sup> Joseph Bonaparte, who resided then at Bordentown,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 236

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 236

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 237

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 237

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 248

"was attracted toward him [Hopper] the first moment he saw him, on account of a strong resemblance to his brother Napoleon."<sup>1</sup> In contrasting the two men the author wrote:

But his powerful will was remarkably under the control of his conscience, and his energy was tempered by an unusual share of benevolence. If the other elements of his character had not been balanced by these two qualities, he also might have been a skillful diplomatist, and a successful leader of armies. Fortunately for himself and others, he had a nobler ambition<sup>2</sup> than that of making widows and orphans by wholesale slaughter.

At the time of the controversy with the Society of Friends, Isaac Hopper joined the "Hicksites." Soon after this affiliation he found himself in straitened circumstances. He removed to New York, where he opened a book store on Pearl Street in which Quaker books concerning the controversy were for sale.

The 1830's were a period of increased northern hostility to slavery. The uncompromising demand for immediate and unconditional emancipation of every slave was set forth in pictures, pamphlets and books published by the Anti-Slavery Society. Friend Hopper was sympathetic to any movement for the abolition of slavery based on pacific principles. He was therefore willing to sell the literature of the society at his book store.

In the spring of 1841, Maria Child had arrived in New York to edit the Anti-Slavery Standard. It was at this time that she went to live with the Isaac Hopper family. His bookselling business had diminished as the controversy within the Society of Friends subsided. The old Quaker, now seventy

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 243

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 249

years old, was appointed Treasurer and Book-Agent for the Anti-Slavery Society, a position which he discharged with great fidelity from 1841 to 1845, when he became agent of the Prison Association of New York.

In the spring of 1852 Friend Hopper was stricken with his final illness. Mrs. Child was summoned to his death bed and arrived two days before his death. Since she had lived in his household for some years and had already asked and obtained permission to write his biography, it was natural that she should be present to receive his farewell benediction. His death was peaceful and his burial simple, with Judge George Edmonds and Lucretia Mott offering tributes to the virtues and abilities of their departed friend.

This volume was a new type of writing for Mrs. Child. The public had long been accustomed to great variety in her titles, and though the critics complained that this memoir was merely a re-telling of interesting stories but without unity, the public was enthusiastic about it. Twelve thousand copies were rapidly sold and publication continued through 1881. The family of Isaac Hopper approved the volume. A daughter, Abby Hopper Gibbons, sent a copy to Catherine Sedgwick, who read it to the prisoners at the Lenox jail, who were deeply moved for their "gratitude for his friendship and kindness were deep and fervent."<sup>1</sup>

Although busy with the editing of the Anti-Slavery Standard, Mrs. Child spent much of her time during her stay in New York in the Mercantile and Commercial libraries, devoting herself to research for the most arduous

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<sup>1</sup>Sarah Hopper Emerson, Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons, I, 244

intellectual labor of her life. Finished eight years later under the guidance of her brother and of Theodore Parker, The Progress of Religious Ideas through Successive Ages, published in three volumes, was the least financially successful of all her books. In 1867 the author wrote, "My Progress of Religious Ideas, 3 vols., was a dead loss, pecuniarily, it was stereotyped; but being unpopular with the clergy, no second edition was called for, and the plates lie unused; in the hands of Charles S. Francis."<sup>1</sup>

At no time did Mrs. Child expect success from this volume. She wrote it, as she wrote many of her non-fictional writings, from the deep conviction that such a book would serve a definite purpose. As early as July, 1848, she wrote to her brother:

My book gets slowly on. I am not sustained by the least hope that by mode of treating the subject will prove acceptable to any class of persons. No matter! I am going to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, as clearly as I can understand it, and let Christians and Infidels, Orthodox and Unitarians, Catholics and Protestants and Swedenborgians, growl as they like. They all will growl if they notice the book at all; for each one will want to have his own theory favored, and the only thing I have conscientiously aimed at is not to favor any theory... How queer it seems to me to read long arguments to prove that Philo must have had some idea of the Christian Trinity! Because Plato stands behind Christ, they cannot see him, though his head and shoulders are so plainly visible. One thing I have learned in the course of my labors. It is of no use to ask questions of others, to seek assistance from them, unless it be concerning the titles of books which contain the most trustworthy information. More and more I feel that every sort of salvation we do attain to in this life must be worked out by ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

Her pessimistic feeling about the book proved only too true, yet Emerson, thanking her for this "noble gift," wrote "the topics have the strongest

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Dartmouth College (Two copies of this letter are included. The second is in Mrs. Child's meticulous writing, and notes, "Theodore Parker's Letter to L. Maria Child. Translated from his hieroglyphic writing.")

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 65

attraction for me."<sup>1</sup> This failure was "no doubt due partly to the fact that the book set itself in decided opposition, unequivocal though gentle, to the prevailing religious impressions of the community. It may have been also that it was too learned for a popular book and too popular for a learned one."<sup>2</sup>

In the Preface, the author disavowed learning:

If readers complain of want of profoundness, they may perchance be willing to accept simplicity and clearness in exchange for depth... Doubtless a learned person would have performed the task far better in many respects; but, on some accounts, my want of learning is an advantage. Thoughts do not range so freely when the storeroom of the brain is overloaded with furniture.<sup>3</sup>

Again the Preface advises:

I would candidly advise, persons who are conscious of bigoted attachment to any creed, or theory, not to purchase this book. Whether they are bigoted Christians or bigoted infidels, its tone will be likely to displease them.<sup>4</sup>

From Theodore Parker came a letter of praise which contained a measure of constructive criticism.

Your book came to me on all Saints' Day and I hail it an All Souls' Candle. It is a magnificent book. I see no fault whatever to find with the spirit, which is the main thing; on the contrary, much that is admirable and uncommon. I feared that when you came to make a thorough acquaintance with the anti Christian Forms of Religion, and then with the minute details of the Christian history, you would be disgusted with all that bears the name of Christian. As it is, I see not a trace of that. Your book is written in the spirit of Humanity and of Piety. It is full of devout reverence for God, for man, for woman; and with a beautiful gratitude to that dear great soul, Jesus of Nazareth. I never call him Redeemer,

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Yale University Library. Samuel May wrote to Mrs. Child, "I will tell you what I have said of it in private circles, and from my pulpit - that 'it is the most valuable contribution to an enlarged, charitable and true theology that has been made by anyone in the country.'"

<sup>2</sup>Higginson, op. cit., p. 131

<sup>3</sup>Lydia Child, The Progress of Religious Ideas through Successive Ages, Preface

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Preface



Saviour, Mediator. I hate all those titles; they are damaged phraseology. I never call him Christ; for he was not the O.T. Christ, - nothing like it. I like much the way you speak of him.

Dr. Parker suggested that in the second edition the volume be divided into eleven books, each devoted to a different religion, for "many readers easily take in special details, but have not the grasp of mind to comprehend the whole of a thing, in all its proportions." He also noted Maria Child's confusion of the Teutonic Tribes as the Celtic Tribes.

The letter closes with congratulations to the author:

I have read in all parts of all the three vols.; and cannot think that you have shown any partiality to any one sect of party. I congratulate you on the termination of so long an arduous a work; which yet has no doubt been a delight and not a weariness. I am to pass over the same field, and wish my work some ten or twenty years hence, might be as well done as yours.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote the gentle Theodore Parker, offering praise where it was due and pointing out improvements in his hopeful reference to a second edition. No second edition was called for, a fact which Mrs. Child attributed to the volume's unpopularity with the clergy.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this need be sought no further than the bibliography frankly appended to the book. Of the titles included, with the exception of seven in French, all are in English. Unfortunately, the sources are in many cases second rate. Perhaps nowhere in all her writing did Maria Child show her lack of formal learning more than in spending eight or more years in preparing this volume, and basing it on such authorities as William Enfield's History of Philosophy, Henry T. Buckle's History of Civilization<sup>3</sup> and Alfred E. Taylor's Plato.

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Yale University, undated

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter to Mr. Tillinghast, December 10, 1867, Yale University

<sup>3</sup>Long excerpts from this volume are found in manuscript in the Yale University Manuscript Collection. Especially detailed are references to the Jews.

The author was throughout her life endlessly seeking for a religion which would satisfy her heart and imagination. She never found it, but later in life she became reconciled to all faiths, realizing that all sought the same end. In the eight years spent in writing this volume she sought to find the answer to her search, and the extent of her failure is in a large measure the failure of the book. Theodore Parker praised her for favoring no creed. She favored none because she believed in none.

Her religion was a personal acceptance of a divine Being whose charity and love she emulated. With theology and creed she had no patience. Thoroughly independent in her thinking despite her undoubted affection for her brother, a Unitarian minister, and her close affiliation with Isaac Hopper, a devout Quaker, she never bound herself to any religion. Early in life her brother concerned himself with her religious doubts. Frankly expressing that she sought the consolation of religion, she wrote in 1820:

You need not fear my becoming a Swedenborgian. I am in more danger of wrecking on the rocks of skepticism than of stranding on the shoals of fanaticism. I am apt to regard a system of religion as I do any other beautiful theory. It plays round the imagination, but fails to reach the heart. I wish I could find some religion in which my heart and understanding could unite; that amidst the darkest clouds of this life I might ever be cheered with the mild halo of religious consolation.<sup>1</sup>

Thirty-six years later her doubts remained. She wrote to her brother concerning theology:

I still have a difficulty in seeing eye to eye with you. If there is such a science, I should define it as treating of man's relations with God; while ethics treat of his relations with fellow-man. Is there any basis for a science concerning the nature of the Divine Being, and the regulations of human souls with him? What have we for guides into the infinite, except faith and aspiration? And must not faith and aspiration necessarily differ in individuals, according to temperament, education, and other external influences?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 7

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 74

Maria Child was a practical woman. Her reasons for doubt of established religions were in a measure based on the acts of members of those established sects, and the uses to which the Bible were put. In 1869 she wrote of her disillusionment to her lifetime friend, Miss Lucy Osgood:

A friend is accustomed to say that my 'bark is worse than my bite,' and it is something so with regard to my theological intolerance. For instance, I have given yearly to the American Missionary Association, ever since emancipation, twenty dollars a year, to help them support a teacher among the freedmen, true blue orthodox. Yet when I proposed to them to aid me in the circulation of my Freedmen's Book, offering them several hundred volumes at the mere cost of materials, they were not willing to do it unless they could be allowed to cut out several articles, and in lieu thereof insert orthodox tracts about 'redeeming blood,' etc. Yet my book contained not one sectarian word, except here and there an orthodox phrase in articles written by colored people. I do sincerely believe that all creeds which make faith in doctrines of more importance than the practice of morality have an injurious effect on character, and I abominate them.<sup>1</sup>

The use of the Bible as a bulwark of slavery was a great shock to Mrs. Child. To Mrs. Shaw she wrote in 1879:

The first thing that began to free my mind from traditional fetters on this subject was that the Bible argument in favor of slavery should be maintained with as much show of strength as the reverse. I have no doubt that many Southerners honestly believed, on Scriptural grounds, that slavery was a divine institution.<sup>2</sup>

More than twenty years previous this doubt was present in her mind. To her religious as well as intellectual mentor, Dr. Francis, she wrote in 1856:

I am passing through strange spiritual experiences; not at all of my own seeking or willing. Ideas which formerly seemed to me a foundation firm as the everlasting hills, are rolling away under my feet, leaving me on a ladder poised on the clouds. Still

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 201

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library

the ladder stays fixed, like Jupiter and the Virgin Mary seated on clouds in pictures. I have ceased to believe that any revelation written for one age or in one age can be adapted to all ages. I once thought that an inner spiritual meaning invested the Christian sacred books with a character infinite and eternal. I tried Swedenborg's key to correspondence, but it unlocked nothing. Wander where I would, I found nothing inscribed on the walls, but that everlasting duality of 'Love and Wisdom.' Every mineral said it, every flower said it, and the archangel said no more.<sup>1</sup>

Although independent in her religious thinking, Maria Child early respected the religious feelings of others. In the Mother's Book, second edition, published in 1831, she wrote, in recommending books for young readers:

I have omitted works at all sectarian in their character, even when I thought them uncommonly excellent in other respects. I have two reasons for this. The first and strongest is, that I deem it injudicious to inculcate any peculiar religious opinions in early life; and the second is, that I could not conscientiously do it, without interfering with the perfect religious freedom which prevails in this land of various creeds.<sup>2</sup>

Two years before her death Mrs. Child was still convinced of the unimportance of creeds. She believed that the teaching received in childhood often determined one's religious creed, but felt that theologies were unimportant, for all people seek the one God. "The human family," she wrote in 1878, "are all children of the same Father, though they call Him by various name, and serve him in different ways."<sup>3</sup>

With this same spirit of acceptance which marked her entire life, Mrs. Child prepared her Progress of Religious Ideas through Successive Ages. She sought vainly throughout her life for a faith in which she could wholeheartedly believe. Her search was a failure, but eventually she became reconciled to all faiths and found much to admire in each, while maintaining her individual independence.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 74

<sup>2</sup>Lydia Child, Mother's Book, p. 99

<sup>3</sup>Manuscript Letter, Yale University

### 5. Captain John Brown

In October of 1859 Captain John Brown led his ill-fated seventeen men across the Potomac River in an abortive attempt to capture the military arsenal at Harper's Ferry. The plan was to capture the arsenal by force and with the weapons to set the slaves free and arm them for an uprising. To the South the thought of a possible uprising of a million slaves might well be appalling in its possibilities. Northern reaction was varied. While Whittier, the Quaker, felt deeply "for the noble-hearted, self-sacrificing old man" yet "as friends of peace as well as believers in the Sermon on the Mount, we dare not lend any countenance to such attempts as that at Harper's Ferry."<sup>1</sup> Alcott defended "the deed and the man." Throughout New England many felt that treason was treason regardless of the motive. The Liberator gave its editorial support to John Brown, but it remained for Lydia Maria Child to interpose the personal element. While distressed by the violence of the act, Mrs. Child was moved by the idealism which inspired it. To a friend she wrote happily:

Recent events have renewed my youth and strength, and filled me with electricity, and one word of apology for slavery makes the sparks fly. What a sublime martyrdom was that of old John Brown! There was nothing wanting in the details of his conduct. There was a grand simplicity and harmony throughout... If Brown had not taken the arsenal, but had simply taken off such slaves as wanted to go, as he did in Missouri, and had died for that, I should be more completely satisfied with his martyrdom. But he liked Old Testament heroes better than I do. He had his mind filled with the idea of founding a 'city of refuge' and as he acted from his own conscientious convictions, I have no disposition to blame him, though I wish it had been otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Higginson, English Men of Letters Series, John Greenleaf Whittier, p. 78 (Letter to Lydia Maria Child)

<sup>2</sup>Letters, p. 137

Despite these reservations on October 26th, just eight days after the capture of John Brown, she wrote to Governor Wise of Virginia, in whose custody the prisoner awaited trial at Charlestown, for the crimes of "murder, robbery and treason."<sup>1</sup> Relying on the "chivalrous sentiment" and "honor and justice" in the character of the Governor, Mrs. Child requested safe conduct to Virginia to act in the capacity of "mother or sister" to John Brown, and to dress the wounds of this "brave and suffering man." Mrs. Child gave the governor her word of honor, "which was never broken" that his permission to visit Virginia would be used "solely and singly for the purpose of nursing the prisoner, and for no other purpose whatsoever."<sup>2</sup>

Governor Wise answered in a lofty tone that he would send to the Commonwealth's attorney her enclosed letter to John Brown, with the request that the court's permission be asked to deliver it to the prisoner. As to her request to visit John Brown in his prison cell, the Governor, professing himself to be an ardent defender of the Constitution, wrote:

Virginia and Massachusetts are involved in no civil war, and the constitution which unites them in one confederacy guarantees to you privileges and immunities of a citizen of the United States in the State of Virginia. That Constitution I am sworn to support, and am, therefore, bound to protect your privileges and immunities as a citizen of Massachusetts coming into Virginia for any lawful and peaceful purpose.<sup>3</sup>

The concluding paragraph of the letter shows the bitterness which was felt by every Southerner toward the Abolitionists of the North. Governor Wise assured Maria Child that he would never permit an insult to a woman within

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<sup>1</sup>Correspondence between Lydia M. Child and Governor Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia, p. 4

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4

the borders of Virginia even though "it be one who whetted knives of butchery for our mothers, sisters, daughters and babes."<sup>1</sup> Disavowing all tolerance with her sentiments for John Brown, Governor Wise accuses Northern sympathy for inciting the Captain to treason. "His attempt was a natural consequence for your sympathy, and the errors of that sympathy ought to make you doubt its virtue from the effect on his conduct."<sup>2</sup>

Her answering letter turned the Governor's words against him. Quoting from his speeches in Congress and offering examples of total disregard of constitutional obligation in the Lynch Law of the Slave States, Maria Child concludes, "... the less that was said about respect for constitutional obligations as the South, the better."<sup>3</sup> In blunt words she states her opinion of the Governor,

Allowing that Captain Brown did attempt a scheme in which murder, robbery and treason were, to his own consciousness, involved, I do not see how Governor Wise can consistently arraign him for crimes he has himself commended. You have threatened to trample on the Constitution, and break the Union, if a majority of the legal voters in these Confederate States dared to elect a President unfavorable to the extension of Slavery. Is not such a declaration proof of premeditated treason?<sup>4</sup>

To the charge that the sympathy of abolitionists precipitated the raid, Mrs. Child offers a scathing denial:

In your letter you suggest that such a scheme as Captain Brown's is the natural result of the opinions with which I sympathize. Even if I thought this to be a correct statement, though I should deeply regret it, I could not draw the conclusion that humanity

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 4

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 4

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 6

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 6

ought to be stifled, and truth struck dumb, for fear that long-successful despotism might be endangered by their utterance. But the fact is, you mistake the source of that strange outbreak. No abolition arguments or denunciations, however earnestly, loudly, or harshly proclaimed would have produced that result. It was the legitimate consequence of the continual and constantly-increasing aggressions of the Slave Power. The Slave States, in their desperate efforts to sustain a bad and dangerous institution, have encroached more and more upon the liberties of the Free States. Our inherent love of law and order, and our superstitious attachment to the Union, you have taken for cowardice; and rarely have you let slip any opportunity to add insult to aggression.<sup>1</sup>

While denouncing the "crawling sinuosity of Everett"<sup>2</sup> by which one could not judge the free, enlightened yeomanry of New England," Maria Child taunts the Governor to fulfill the:

Off-repeated threat of withdrawal from the Union. It has ceased to be a bugbear, for we begin to despair of being able, by any process, to give the world an example of a real republic. The moral sense of these States is outraged by being accomplices in sustaining an institution vicious in all its respects; and it is now generally understood that we purchase our disgrace at great pecuniary expense. If you would only make the offer of a separation in serious earnest, you would hear the hearty response of millions, 'Go, gentlemen, and Stand not upon the order of your going, But go at once!'<sup>3</sup>

In November the New York Tribune published the correspondence between Maria Child and Governor Wise. Maria Child wrote to the editor, expressing her surprise in seeing the letters published since she had never given any person a copy and must then presume that the letters had been sent from

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9

<sup>2</sup>Edward Everett, Governor of Massachusetts, in presenting the official message of the Southern States in 1836, said, "Whatever by direct and necessary operation is calculated to excite an insurrection among the slaves has been held, by highly respectable legal authority, an offense against this Commonwealth, which may be prosecuted as a misdemeanor at common law." Jesse Macy, The Anti-Slavery Crusade, p. 73

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 12



Virginia. She explained that while others, including her own niece, would have been happy to travel to Charlestown to nurse "that brave and generous old man who so willingly gives his life as a sacrifice for God's oppressed poor,"<sup>1</sup> she felt that her age (she was then fifty-seven) and excellent state of health rendered her a suitable person, and gladly she planned her journey. "My attention was to slip away quietly, without having the affair made public. I packed my trunk and collected a quantity of old linens for lint and awaited a reply from Virginia."<sup>2</sup> When Governor Wise answered, he suggested the "impudence of trying any experiment upon the peace of society already greatly excited."<sup>3</sup> As usual she took counsel with her husband, and together they concluded that "as the noble old veteran was said to be fast recovering from his wounds" and that her presence "might create a popular excitement unfavorable to such chance as the prisoner had for a fair trial." She was satisfied that he would be properly cared for by his wife, "said to be a brave-hearted Roman matron, worthy of such a mate,"<sup>4</sup> who had journeyed to her husband.

Maria Child enclosed the following letter, which she had forwarded to Captain Brown. This document clearly expresses the divided sentiment of New England which, while reverencing the old hero, condemned the violence of his act.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 13

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 13

Dear Capt. Brown:

Though personally unknown to you, you will recognize in my name an earnest friend of Kansas, when circumstances made that Territory the battle-ground between the antagonistic principle of slavery and freedom, which politicians so vainly strive to reconcile in the government of the United States.

Believing in peace principles, I cannot sympathize with the method you chose to advance the cause of freedom. But I honor your generous intentions - I admire your courage, moral and physical. I reverence you for the humanity which tempered your zeal. I sympathize with you in your cruel bereavement, your sufferings and your wrongs. In brief, I love you and bless you.

Thousands of hearts are throbbing with sympathy as warm as mine. I think of you night and day, bleeding in prison, surrounded by hostile faces, sustained only by trust in God and your own strong heart. I long to nurse you - to speak to you sisterly words of sympathy and consolation. I have asked permission of Governor Wise to do so. If the request is not granted, I cherish the hope that these few words may at least reach your hands, and afford you some little solace. May you be strengthened by the conviction that no honest man ever sheds blood for freedom in vain, however much he may be mistaken in his efforts. May God sustain you, and carry you through whatsoever may be in store for you! Yours, with heartfelt respect, sympathy and affection,

L. Maria Child<sup>1</sup>

Also enclosed was John Brown's grateful reply. While tactfully telling her that he could not see how her journey to Charlestown could do him the least good, John Brown suggested another channel through which her sympathies would reach him more effectively. He suggested that she contribute fifty cents yearly for the support of his wife and children, who would be left destitute by his death. He further urged her to devote her energies to induce others to join her in establishing a fund for this purpose.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 14

The wife and daughters of John Brown came to Concord on their way to Virginia from their home in North Elba, Essex County, New York. Maria Child, as well as Elizabeth Peabody and many other abolitionists sympathizers, set about collecting supplies and money for them to take to John Brown and his followers in prison.

On December 23, 1859 Maria Child wrote a letter to Mrs. Brown, which clearly shows that she had been busy carrying out the project which John Brown had bequeathed to her.

My dear friend, Among the many eloquent things that have been said concerning the great and good man, who has gone from us, nothing has touched my feelings more than the letters I have received from the colored people in various parts of the country. You will see, in this week's 'Liberator' one from a colored man in Ohio. A fortnight ago, there was one in the 'Tribune' from a colored man in Canada, saying that all the Fugitives there wanted to give their 'mite' toward a fund for John Brown's family. At the meeting house in South Street, Boston, I heard an old black man pour forth his soul in prayer to God on the solemn 2d of Dec. about half past 11 o'clock. His speech was rude; for the pride and oppression of his white brethren had given him no chance for mental culture, but there was touching eloquence in the manner in which he prayed for you; that the Lord would comfort you, and hold you up, and make clear to you the mysterious ways of his Providence. He told the Lord that he had 'been a slave, and knew how bitter it was;' and he ejaculated, in fervent tones, 'Since it has pleased Thee to take away our Moses, Oh, Lord God, raise us up a Joshua.' to which all the audience responded with a loud 'Amen.'

....apart from my respect for your noble husband, as the brave advocate of freedom, and the self-sacrificing friend of the oppressed, I owe him personal gratitude for what his example has done for my own soul. Since he was offered up, I have consecrated myself with renewed zeal to the righteous cause he loved so well; and I see indications of the same influence on multitudes of minds in all parts of the Free States. Letters to that effect come pouring in upon me from all quarters; from Minnesota to Maine. He will prove the greatest benefactor the colored race have ever had.

Eight or ten days ago, I transmitted in a letter to you \$10 from one of your husband's friends. Did you receive it?

Yours with affectionate respect and heartfelt sympathy,

L. Maria Child<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Dartmouth College

The publication of these letters brought a vindictive reply from Mrs. M. J. C. Mason of Alto, King George's County, Virginia, wife of the author of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Personal, reproachful and bordering upon the hysterical, Mrs. Mason begins:

Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, 'Woe unto you, hypocrites,' and take to yourself with two-fold damnation that terrible sentence; for rest assured, in the day of judgment, it shall be more tolerable for those scathed by the awful denunciation of the Son of God than for you. You would soothe with sisterly and motherly care the hoary-headed murderer of Harper's Ferry! A man whose aim and intention was to incite the horrors of a servile war - to condemn women of your own race, ere death closed their eyes on their sufferings from violence and outrage, to see their husbands and fathers murdered, their children butchered, the ground strewn with the brains of their babes.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Mason now demands of Mrs. Child:

Compare yourself with those your 'sympathy' would devote to such ruthless ruin, and say, on that 'word of honor which never has been broken,' would you stand by the bedside of an old negro, dying of a hopeless disease, to alleviate his sufferings as far as human aid could? Have you ever watched the last, lingering illness of a consumptive, to soothe, as far as in you lay, the inevitable fate? Do you soften the pangs of maternity in those around you by all the care and comfort you can give?... Did you ever sit up until the 'wee hours' to complete a dress for a motherless child, that she might appear on Christmas day in a new one, along with her more fortunate companions? We do these and more for our servants, and why? Because we endeavor to do our duty in that state of life it has pleased God to place us.<sup>2</sup>

Having delivered this tirade, including the favorite Biblical injunctions which had long been the answer of all pro-slavery forces, Mrs. Mason becomes personal in her attack. She writes:

No Southerner ought after your letter to Governor Wise and to Brown, to read a line of your composition, or to touch a magazine which bears your name in its lists of contributors;

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 10

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13

and in this we hope for the 'sympathy' at least of those in the North who deserve the name of woman.<sup>1</sup>

Over a month was to elapse before a devastating reply came from Mrs. Child. Quiet, factual yet scathing in its very calmness, Mrs. Child opens her letter by assuring Mrs. Mason that she wishes her well:

both in this world and the next. If the anathema proved a safety valve to your own boiling spirit, it did some good to you while it fell harmless upon me. Fortunately for all of us, the Heavenly Father rules His universe by laws, which the passions or the prejudices of mortals have no power to change.<sup>2</sup>

Answering text by text from the Bible, Mrs. Child then proceeds to attack the peculiar institution by evidence "drawn entirely from Southern sources."<sup>3</sup> From the laws of Southern States, the advertisements for runaway slaves in Southern States, and the testimony of former slave owners the arguments are logically marshalled. On such a basis Mrs. Child asks, "Looking at the system of slavery in the light of all this evidence, do you candidly think we deserve 'two-fold damnation' for detesting it?"<sup>4</sup>

While up to this point the answer to Mrs. Mason follows the manner of Abolition writings, Mrs. Child now turns to the personal questions which have been asked her.

It would be extremely difficult to find any woman in our villages who does not sew for the poor, and watch with the sick, whenever occasion requires. We pay our domestics generous wages, with which they can purchase as many Christmas gowns as they please; a process far better for their characters, as well as our own, than to receive their clothing as charity, after being deprived of just payment for their labor.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 18

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 25

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 26

Thus far the letter was effective, but when published as an abolition pamphlet, it was the next sentence which was quoted again and again and in a large measure may have accounted for the three hundred thousand copies which were rapidly sold.<sup>1</sup> With that straight forward manner so characteristic of her, Mrs. Child wrote, "I have never known an instance where the 'pangs of maternity' did not meet with requisite assistance; and here at the North, after we have helped the mothers, we do not sell the babies."<sup>2</sup>

With scorn Mrs. Child replies to the threat that "no Southerner ought henceforth to read a line of my composition."

I have great satisfaction in the consciousness of having nothing to lose in that quarter. Twenty-seven years ago, I published a book called An Appeal in behalf of Those Americans Called Africans. It influenced the minds of several young men, afterward conspicuous in public life, through whose agency the cause was better served than it could have been by me. From that time to this, I have labored too earnestly for the slave to be agreeable to slaveholders. Literary popularity was never a paramount object with me, even in my youth; and now, that I am old, I am utterly indifferent to it. But, if I cared for the exclusion you threaten, I should at least have the consolation of being exiled with honorable company.<sup>3</sup>

This honorable company consists of Dr. Channing, William C. Bryant, Pierpont, Lowell, Longfellow, Emerson, George W. Curtis, Mrs. Stowe, Theodore Parker, Dr. Cheever, and Henry Ward Beecher. In fact, she concludes, "the whole civilized world proclaims Slavery as outlaw, and the best intellect of the age is active in hunting it down."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. xix

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 26

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 26

The following year she clearly showed the real understanding she possessed of the problem of the slave and the master. With the publication in New York in 1860 of The Right Way the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies and Elsewhere, Maria Child established her place as a historian of the inevitable movement toward universal emancipation. Clear and convincing The Right Way is free from unfairness or shrill invective. The volume retells the story of British emancipation of slaves and makes practical suggestions for applying these same methods to the critical situation then present in American slave holding states.

Much of the information is based on the "Oration in Honour of Universal Emancipation in the British Empire," delivered by David Child in Boston. The mental compatability of this couple was such that it was impossible to tell which did the actual writing. As many abolitionists spoke with the words of Lydia Child, so her husband was often inspired by her intense feeling for the freedom of the slave.

The year before the war Mrs. Child "sent slave-holders over twelve hundred copies of The Right Way the Safe Way, directed them with her own hand, and paid the postage out of her own purse; and received but one response."<sup>1</sup> The attitude of the slave owner is understandable, yet the disappointment of the author, who was following the dictates of her conscience in an honest effort to aid in a critical situation, was intense.

When on December 18, 1865 the Secretary of State, William H. Seward, officially proclaimed the abolition of slavery, the cause to which Mrs. Child had devoted more than thirty years of her life had at last reached a successful

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 192

conclusion. Thirty-two years had passed since at the height of her literary career Mrs. Child had published the Appeal. During these years her pen had always been at the service of the slave. She was but thirty-one years of age when she chose to sacrifice her literary and social position for the sake of this most unpopular cause. When success finally came she was sixty-five years old and had completed the work which brought her contemporary fame. The measure of the financial and literary sacrifice she made cannot be estimated, for she never considered that there was any other course to follow than that to which she dedicated half the adult years of her life.

Most people would have felt that thirty years service to a cause was sufficient, but not Mrs. Child. She never underestimated the problems of the reconstruction period, but now realized more than ever that the now emancipated slave needed guidance, and toward that end she published in 1865 the Freedman's Book, which opened with a letter to that group explaining the purpose of the volume.

I have prepared this book for you, with the hope that those of you who can read will read it aloud to others, and that all of you will derive fresh strength and courage from this true record of what colored men have accomplished, under great disadvantages.

I have written all the biographies over again, in order to give you as much information as possible in the fewest words. I take nothing for my services; and the book is sold to you at the cost of paper, printing, and binding. Whatever money you pay for any of the volumes will be immediately invested in other volumes to be sent to freedmen in various parts of the country, on the same terms; and whatever money remains in my hands, when the book ceases to sell, will be given to the Freedmen's Aid Association, to be expended in schools for you and your children.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia Child, The Freedmen's Book, Preface



Fifty some articles and biographies follow, approximately half of which were written by members of the colored race. The style is simple and effective, giving the lives and accomplishments of the colored race during the years of enslavement. Fourteen articles were written by Mrs. Child, many of them devoted to practical advice and hints on health. Always at her best when educating others or when working for their betterment, Mrs. Child shows the strength of her writing in the simplicity with which she wrote each article.

Writing to the Reverend Samuel J. May in January, 1866 Mrs. Child expressed her appreciation of his praise for the book. She wrote:

I live so entirely apart from the world that when I publish anything I rarely see or hear anything about the effect it produces. ...I had a feeling that such a book as The Freedmen's Book was needed at the present time and might do good. In order to adapt it carefully for them, I wrote over two hundred letter pages of manuscript copy; and then despairing of getting it published, I paid six hundred dollars to get it through the press; which sum, if it ever returns, will be a fund to help in the education of freedmen and their children. I have done what I could, and I hope a blessing will rest upon it. That you approve so heartily is one guaranty that it will be useful.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 192

## CHAPTER V

### SUNSET YEARS

#### 1. Looking Toward Sunset

Although the close of her anti-slavery work ended the practical writings of Mrs. Child, her interest in aiding others continued until her death. After 1865, then in her sixties, Maria Child entered what she considered the sunset years of her life. In keeping with this knowledge she published Looking toward Sunset, a collection of prose and verse, in order to "give words of consolation"<sup>1</sup> to those who were her companions in age.

The intense religious fervor of the author is shown in the Preface,

If the rays of my morning have helped to germinate seeds that ripen into flowers and fruit, I am grateful to Him, from whom all light and warmth proceeds. And now I reverently ask His blessing on this attempt to imitate, in my humble way, the setting rays of that great luminary, which throws cheerful gleams into so many lonely old homes, which kindles golden fires on trees whose foliage is falling, and lights up the silvered heads on which it rests with a glory that reminds one of immortal crowns.<sup>2</sup>

Any collection published by a well-known author has a dual interest. Primarily its interest arises from the contributions of the author, but a secondary interest rests in the selections of other authors. The very names and again the titles have powerful connotations. Maria Child's contributions are nine in number and vary from short stories to practical hints about health. Such versatility means, of course, an uneven production. If anyone could have successfully carried out the project, she would have been able to do so, for her mind was capable of easily moving from mysticism to realism.

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia M. Child, Looking toward Sunset, Preface

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Preface

The initial story is by Maria Child, and is entitled "The Friends."

This is a simple story of the estrangements of two young friends, separated by position and religion, but in old age finally reunited. The locale is Maine, and the friends, Harriet Brown and Jane White, are mere ciphers of characterization on which are superimposed the transcendental observations on friendship, beauty of soul and religion.

"It was the custom of Mr. Francis, on the evening before Thanksgiving, to gather in his dependents and humble friends to the number of twenty or thirty, and feast them on chicken pie, doughnuts and other edibles, sending them home with provisions for a further festival, including 'turnovers' for the children."<sup>1</sup> One of the most touching scenes in this story deals with a grandmother preparing a treat for her grandchildren. The "turnovers" so ardently desired by the children may well have been a result of the memories of childhood treats.

"Old Folks at Home" is an attempt on the part of Mrs. Child to express in verse the pleasure she always found in simple things. While this poem is typical of the sentimental verse of the times there is a certain charm in the lines:

More pleasant seem their own surroundings,  
Though quaint and old,  
Than newer homes, with their aboundings  
Of marble, silk, and gold.  
For 'tis the heart inspires home-feelings,  
In hut or hall,  
Where memory, with its fond revealings,  
Sheds a tender light o'er all.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Preface

They love the wonted call to meeting  
 By their old bell;  
 They love the old familiar greeting  
 From friends who know them well.  
 Their homesick hearts are always yearning,  
 When they're away;  
 And ever is their memory turning  
 To scenes where they used to stay.<sup>1</sup>

Another poem by the same title is included in the volume:

They love the places where they wandered  
 When they were young;  
 They love the books they've often pondered,  
 They love the tunes they've sung.

The easy-chair, so soft and cozy,  
 Is their delight  
 The ample slippers, warm and cozy,  
 And the dear old bed at night.

#### CHORUS

Near their hearth-stones, warm and cheery,  
 Where, by night or day,  
 They're free to rest when they are weary,  
 There the old folks love to stay.<sup>2</sup>

"The Mysterious Pilgrimage"<sup>3</sup> is an allegorical presentation of the story of life. Each phase of life is represented as a stage in the journey of a traveller through a wood. In compliance with the purpose of the book the joys of age are stressed as far outdistancing the transitory joys of youth, while death is portrayed as a release from all sorrow to a happy eternal life with all loved ones.

The companion pieces, "Unmarried Women" and "Old Bachelors" are presented by Mrs. Child. The states of a woman and a man who have from necessity or choice remained single are contrasted. The usefulness of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 61

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 363

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 1

unmarried woman is stressed. Mrs. Child concludes;

A woman may make a respectable appearance as a wife, with a character far less noble than is necessary to enable her to lead a single life with usefulness and dignity. She is sheltered and concealed behind her husband; but the unmarried woman must rely upon herself; and she lives in a glass house, open to the gaze of every passer-by. To the feeble-minded, marriage is almost a necessity, and if wisely formed, it doubtless renders the life of any woman more happy. But happiness is not the sole and end aim of this life. We are sent here to build up a character; and sensible women may easily reconcile themselves to a single life, since even its disadvantages may be converted into means for development of all the faculties which God has endowed them.<sup>1</sup>

The life of the bachelor is praised as an opportunity for service. Examples are given of the kindness of bachelors culminating in the story of the kindness of the Cherryble brothers to Nicholas Nickleby. The opportunities for service on the part of unmarried women and bachelors is, as it was the keynote of her own life, the central theme of the story. Among the women who have given such service usefully and agreeably:

There is the charming Miss Mitford, whose writings cheer the soul like a meadow of cowslips in the spring time. There is Frederica Bremer, whose writings have blessed so many souls. There is Joanna Baillie, Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Hamilton, and our own honored Catherine M. Sedgwick, whose books have made the world wiser and better than they found it.<sup>2</sup>

Such gentle appreciation is in keeping with the entire philosophy of Maria Child.

"Moral Hints" and "Hints about Health" constitute the practical contributions of Mrs. Child. The authorities quoted for the former are: Colton, Montaigne, Dr. Johnson, Tucker, Southey, Adam Clarke and Michael Angelo.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 143

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 133

The latter is based on the authority of the French physician, Dumoulin, the Reverend Sidney Smith, Ludovico Carnaro, John Wesley, Duke of Wellington, Hon. Josiah Quincy, Reverend Daniel Waldo, Leigh Hunt and a Doctor Warren, with whose condemnation of smoking, drinking, the use of snuff and tobacco Maria Child agrees. "Hints about Health" is in a large measure based on the effectiveness of the external use of cold water, and the internal use of fruit juices. The "Moral Hints" are based on the fact that no two things tend "so much to make human beings unhappy in themselves and unpleasant to others as habits of fretfulness and despondency."<sup>1</sup> Pleasant external objects, and opportunities to improve ourselves are the means by which these faults may be overcome. Examples are given to those who have succeeded when late in life. The practical ideas put forth in both these essays would be most advantageous to the young as well as to their elders to whom they are addressed.

Maria Child's last selection is a "Letter from an Old Woman on Her Birthday," which discusses the compensations of age. The most important of these advantages conferred by age is the release from the tyranny of convention. Mrs. Child writes, "I never conformed much to the world's way, but now that I am an old woman, I feel more free to ignore its conventional forms, and neglect its fleeting fashion."<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Child's words are literally true. Never having been desirous for clothes for personal adornment in her youth, during her later years Mrs. Child gave up all claim to following fashion. She was one of the last women to wear a bonnet, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 164

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 220

contemporary accounts seem to agree that her taste was for practical garments. This selection closes with the final advice that one should "travel cheerfully toward the Sunset!"<sup>1</sup>

Her last contribution is an editorial one. In 1861 Linda was published by Harriet Jacobs. Maria Child had assumed financial responsibility for seeing this book through the publishers. Unfortunately the publisher failed, and on March 14, 1861 she wrote to a friend in New Bedford, asking help in the distribution of this book.<sup>2</sup> The author of the book was an "esteemed friend," whose story was introduced into this volume to "illustrate the power of character over circumstances."<sup>3</sup> This authentic account of slavery shows Mrs. Child's editorial hand in the restrained and factual manner in which the harrowing details of a life of slavery are given.

Abolitionists and friends of Maria Child are prominent among the contributors to this volume. John G. Whittier is represented by two selections, as is Theodore Parker. Henry Ward Beecher and his daughter Harriet are also included. Edmund H. Sears, pastor of the Unitarian Church of Wayland and author of 'It Came upon the Midnight Clear,' is represented by a prose selection, "Everlasting Youth" from Foregleams of Immortality. Convers Francis, brother of Mrs. Child, is included with an extract from the Memoir of the Honorable John Davis. Among the foreign authors are Charles Dickens, Robert Burns, William Wordsworth, Thomas Hood and Uhland.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 222

<sup>2</sup>Personal Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 360

While Looking toward Sunset is an agreeable collection bearing upon the aspects of old age, its contemporary success is amazing. "The entire edition was exhausted during the holiday season; four thousand copies were sold and more called for. All her profits on the book she devoted to the freedmen, sending four hundred dollars as a first installment."<sup>1</sup>

The Reverend Alfred S. Hudson, writing in 1890 the Home of Lydia Maria Child, stated,

Before the house stand a willow and an elm, both of which have an ancient look, as if the spot were selected for a homestead by one of the town's early grantees. So tall is the elm, that the view southerly is but little obstructed by its low-drooping boughs, and the slanting beams of the setting sun shine broad and full on the window-panes. In short, the structure and its surroundings are such as are aptly described in the following verses from one of Mrs. Child's own selections in Looking toward Sunset:

'The trees fold their green arms round it,  
The trees a century old,  
And the winds go chanting through them,  
And the sunbeams drop their gold.

'The cowslips spring in the marshes,  
And the roses bloom on the hill,  
And beside the brook in the pastures  
The herds go feeding at will.'<sup>2</sup>

The success of this volume was as unexpected by the author as it was welcome to her. To Miss Lucy Osgood, she wrote:

My Sunset Book has had most unexpected success. The edition of 4,000 sold before New Year's Day, and they say they might have sold 2,000 more if they had been ready. This pleases me beyond measure, for the proceeds, whether more or less, were vowed to the freedmen; and cheering old folks with one hand and helping the wronged and suffering with the other, is the highest recreation I ever enjoyed. Nobles or princes cannot discover, or invent, any pleasure equal to earning with one hand

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<sup>1</sup>Beach, op. cit., p. 112

<sup>2</sup>Hudson, op. cit., p. 410. This poem was written by Louise Chandler Moulton.



and giving with the other. I seldom have a passing wish for enlarged means except for the sake of doing more for others. My own wants are very few and simple. I am glad you approve of the book. I am not surprised that the 'Mysterious Pilgrimage' seemed to you 'fanciful.' You know there is a practical side and a poetic side to me. In a book designed for general readers, I thought it best to show both sides. What most pleases one class of readers will be less pleasing to others... My prime object in making the Sunset Book was to present old people with something wholly cheerful. Human nature, as the years pass on, more and more requires cheerful influences. Memory has a superabounding stock of sadness for all, and any addition to it in books or conversation is an unwelcome excess. To everything there is a bright side and a dark side; and I hold it to be unwise, unphilosophic, unkind to others, and unhealthy for one's own soul, to form the habit of looking on the dark side. Cheerfulness is to the spiritual atmosphere what sunshine is to the earthly landscape. I am resolved to cherish cheerfulness with might and main.<sup>1</sup>

Other friends admired the book. Wendell Phillips wrote to the author in November of 1864, "Thank you for your pleasant book. A. and I have read it, and if you saw the tears and smiles, you'd rejoice you had given even one couple so much delight. The new things and the old well known ones come equally welcome."<sup>2</sup>

In December of the same year William C. Bryant sent Mrs. Child "many thanks for the copy of the charming book, Looking toward Sunset," and then adds, "you are like some artists, who excel in sunset views. You give the closing stage of human life an atmosphere of the richest lights and warmest hues, and make its clouds add to its glory. My wife and I have read your book with great delight."<sup>3</sup>

Although this volume met with outstanding success, Maria Child returned to a problem which had concerned her for many years.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 185

<sup>2</sup>Eleanor Lewis, "Letters of Wendell Phillips to Lydia Maria Child," New England Magazine, V, 733

<sup>3</sup>Manuscript Letter, Yale University Library

## 2. A Romance of the Republic

Maria Child went beyond the usual abolitionist willingness to free the slave. She was always concerned with "Prejudices against People of Color, and our Duties in Relation to this Subject," to which she devoted several chapters in her Appeal. As usual her husband was in complete accord with her. When in 1834 he was a trustee of Noyes Academy at New Canaan, New Hampshire, he was instrumental in opening the institution to colored youths. As a result of this action, "the respectable people of the town were so incensed, enraged by this encroachment upon the prerogatives of white children, that, readily helped by the rougher but not baser sort of folks, they razed the building in which the school was kept from its foundation and carried it off into a meadow or swamp."<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Child was always indignant at color discrimination on public conveyances. Throughout her letters and writings to the press she always stressed not only freedom for the slaves but equality for all races. In defense of the Indian Mrs. Child wrote to Mrs. S. B. Shaw in 1873:

As for the poor Indians, would to heaven they had education and newspapers to tell their side of the story! The pages you enclosed scarcely give a glimpse of the real facts that caused the Seminole war. The Seminoles were adopting civilized modes of life. They were devoting themselves to agriculture and had established a friendly relation with their neighbors. But the slaveholders of Georgia wanted to drive them out, because they coveted their lands, and still more because their slaves were prone to take refuge with them. This had been going on for generations, and the fugitives had largely intermarried with the Indians. The slaveholders not only claimed the slaves that had escaped, but their children and grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, on the

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel J. May, Our Antislavery Conflict, p. 268

ground that 'the child follows the condition of the mother.' It was to satisfy them that Jackson got up the war. It was not Osceola's wife and children only that were seized and carried into slavery. Multitudes of their wives and children were carried off; and you may easily conjecture that no very nice care was always taken to ascertain whether they had descended from slaves in the United States or not. The pages you sent contain the cruel remark that, 'the seizure of Osceola's beautiful wife was an unfortunate affair.' God of Heaven, grant me patience! What would he call it if the Indians had seized and carried off his beautiful wife, to see her in the market for a mistress. I hope the writer is no relation of yours, for I have a vehement desire to cuff his ears. As for the Seminoles not removing after they had by treaty agreed to, I do not know the real facts of the case; but this I do know, that General Jackson was in the habit of making nominal treaties with any Indians who could be bought by grog to sign a paper, which was forthwith declared to be an official treaty concluded with the government of the tribe. Just the same as if the government of France or England should enter into negotiations with General Butler, or Boss Tweed, and then claim the arrangement was binding on the government of the United States.<sup>1</sup>

She also defended the Chinese. In writing to "Dear Friend Whittier" in 1870, Maria Child protested:

I was vexed with Henry Wilson for not standing by Charles Sumner in his efforts to have the word white stricken out of the Naturalization Bill. The fact is, Wilson is an ingrained demagogue. He wants to curry favor with the Anti-Chinese party. I dislike and despise this petty 'Native American' feeling. God kept this continent hidden for centuries, to make it a High School for all the nations. Let us fulfill the glorious mission, and be thankful. I welcome the Chinese. Their industry and patience will prove a blessing to this country. Let them build temples to Buddha, if they like. They would be scarcely more foreign to our thoughts and feelings than Altars to the Virgin Mary.<sup>2</sup>

The culmination of all her writings should have been her last novel, A Romance of the Republic, published in 1867. This novel combined her personal love of imaginative writing and her firm belief in racial equality.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 218

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

The volume, "Most Respectfully and Affectionately Inscribed" to the father and mother of the gallant Colonel Robert G. Shaw, deals with two essential problems - one, slavery and its allied horrors, and the other a national one, miscegenation. The former, she had given freely of her energies to fight until eventual success came to the cause. The latter she faced and accepted. Often since her day the story of the beautiful quadroons of New Orleans has been told in fiction, but hers was the pioneer telling.

The story opens in the home of a Mr. Royal, a Bostonian who had settled in New Orleans and had formed an alliance with the mulatto daughter of a Spanish gentleman. She was, of course, a slave and Mr. Royal had bought her from her father. Mr. Royal explained the circumstances to Alfred King, a young Yankee visitor:

I was very unhappy when I first came to New Orleans. I was devoutly attached to a young lady, and I was rudely repelled by her proud and worldly family. I was seized with a vehement desire to prove to them that I could become richer than they were. I rushed madly into the pursuit of wealth, and I was successful; but meanwhile they had married her to another, and I found that wealth alone could not bring happiness. In vain the profits of my business doubled and quadrupled. I was unsatisfied, lonely, and sad. Commercial transaction brought me into intimate relations with Senor Gonzalez, a Spanish gentleman, in St. Augustine. He had formed an alliance with a beautiful slave, whom he had bought in the French West Indies. I never saw her, for she died before my acquaintance with him; but their daughter, then a girl of sixteen, was the most charming creature I ever beheld. The irresistible attraction I felt toward her the first moment I saw her was doubtless the mere fascination of the senses; but when I came to know her more, I found her so gentle, so tender, so modest, and so true, that I loved her with a strong and deep affection. I admired her, too, for other reasons than her beauty; for she had many elegant accomplishments, procured by her father's fond indulgence during two years' residence in Paris. He was wealthy at that time; but he afterward became entangled in pecuniary difficulties, and his health declined. He took a liking to me, and proposed that I should purchase Eulalia, and thus enable him to cancel a debt due to a troublesome creditor whom he suspected of having an eye on his daughter. I gave him a large

sum for her, and brought her with me to New Orleans. Do not despise me for it, my young friend. If it had been told to me a few years before, in my New England home, that I could even become a party to such a transaction, I should have rejected the idea with indignation. But my disappointed and lonely condition rendered me an easy prey to temptation, and I was where public opinion sanctioned such connections.

Two daughters were born of this union. The elder was named Rosabelle and the younger Floracita. Since the mother was a slave, although a dearly beloved one, her husband having neglected to manumit her before her death, the children "followed the condition of the mother." During the lifetime of the father, all was well with the daughters. They were raised in luxury, and trained in all the decorative arts. Music was a constant joy in the house, and Rosabelle possessed a remarkable voice. When the father died suddenly, his possessions were sold "to satisfy the demands of his creditors."<sup>2</sup> The most valuable assets of the estate were the two daughters. They escape from the auction block, and are ultimately happily married to devoted Northern husbands, to whom their quadroon blood is of no importance. Thus Maria Child returns to her earlier theme of miscegenation.

If the story had ended with the marriages it would have been more effective, but it continues through the Civil War with a second generation and becomes hopelessly involved. It is a tribute to the development of the author's ability for characterization that through a story involving seduction, false marriage, pretended suicide, comas, false rumors of death, children changed at birth and coincidences beyond belief, her

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<sup>1</sup>Lydia Child, A Romance of the Republic, p. 20

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 41

characters still retain a semblance of reality. With reason it was said that the book had "too large a frame work, too many vertebrae to the plot."<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate failure of the novel was due to two factors. While the author's life was devoted to freedom for the slave, she had no knowledge of the South; consequently the local color is artificial. The more important reason for the failure is that the volume carried a crushing weight of propaganda. Alfred King, wealthy Yankee husband of Rosabella, and Mrs. Delano, Bostonian society leader, and adopted mother of Floracita, are charged with the greatest burden of counteracting the prejudice against people of color. The result is that these are the least convincing of all the characters. Mrs. Delano, who appears at the psychological moment when Floracita is fleeing from the unwelcome advances of Mr. Fitzgerald, pseudo-husband of Rosabella, is the least realistic. Perhaps her sudden revelation of her early love for Floracita's father is too great a strain on the reader's credulity, and her later action in aiding slaves to escape is foreign to her character as portrayed by the author.

Although melodramatic and overwritten the story has a sincerity which distinguishes it. Directly and indirectly it effectively teaches the doctrine of racial equality.

A sidelight on the method of Mrs. Child as a novelist is revealed in her letters to John S. Dwight, music critic, in 1866. In October of that year Mrs. Child wrote to Dwight:

I want to borrow, for a week, a libretto of Norma, Italian, with an English translation. If you can, without much trouble find me, will you leave it for me at 8 Studio Building...

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 137

I would like to have you mark with a pencil those portions which are a favorite with the public. It is so long since I heard it, or any other music, that I have nearly forgotten about it. I want to make a little incidental use of it in a story.<sup>1</sup>

A further request is made:

Will you for the sake of 'Auld lang syne,' take the trouble to answer me two questions? First, is it very uncommon for a soprano singer to rise to G in the altissimo scale with ease? Second, if you wanted to represent a family, with several members returned from the war, uniting servants and all, in a good, solid, worthy Hymn of Thanksgiving, grand, yet not beyond popular appreciation, what hymn would you choose?<sup>2</sup>

In A Romance of the Republic Rosabella makes her successful Italian debut, singing Norma which she learned in her childhood home. The critics acclaim the fact that her unusual voice range includes G in the altissimo scale. The returning heroes were welcomed with "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled'." Thus did Maria Child gather and use incidental information.

Regardless of its faults this volume was "received with great cordiality, and is in some respects her best fictitious work. It will always possess value as one of the few really able delineations of slavery in fiction, and the author may well look back with pride on this final offering upon that altar of liberty, where so much of her life had been already laid."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript Letter, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 138

### 3. Widowed Years

1874 marked the end of an era in the life of Maria Child. Her husband, who had long been an invalid, died in that year, and with him died all the worldly interests of his devoted wife. Nearly half a century they had lived together, often in their retired Wayland home. Always, however, they were vitally interested in the joys and sorrows of humanity, and the love which joined their lives together gave them an added incentive to serve their fellow man.

The loss of her beloved "mate" ended the joy Mrs. Child found in seclusion. The idea of staying in these familiar surroundings where such joy had been hers was entirely too much in the early days of her grief. The coming winter found her unable to remain in this beloved home, which had been so dear to her for so many years. She decided to spend the winter with her friend, Mrs. Sarah B. Shaw, mother of Colonel Robert Shaw of the 54th Massachusetts, the martyr leader of the first Negro regiment. The Shaws lived on Staten Island, and the first winter of her widowhood was made less lonely by the new scenes and the company of dear friends.

The next year Maria Child returned to her home in Wayland, where she remained for summers visiting a few friends, among them, the Alcotts. Mrs. Alcott, sister of the Reverend S. J. May, was a life long friend. The home of the Alcott's was described by Mrs. Child with all the charm of her powers of description:

The house of the Alcott's took my fancy greatly. When they bought the place the house was so very old that it was thrown into the bargain, with the supposition that it was fit for nothing but fire-wood. But Mr. Alcott has an architectural



taste more intelligible than his Orphic Sayings. He let every old rafter and beam stay in its place, changed ovens and ash-holes into Saxon-arched alcoves, and added a wash-woman's shanty to the rear. The result is a house full of queer nooks and corner, and all manner of juttings in and out. It seems as if the spirit of some old architect had brought it from the Middle Ages and dropped it down in Concord; preserving much better resemblance to the place whence it was brought than the Virgin Mary's house, which the angel carried from Bethlehem to Loretto. The capable Alcott daughters painted and papered the interior themselves. And gradually the artist-daughter filled up all the nooks and corners with panels on which she had painted birds and flowers; and over the open fire places owls blink at you and faces peep from the most unexpected places. The whole leaves a general impression of harmony; of a medieval sort, though different parts of the house seem to have stopped in a dance that became confused because some of the party did not keep time. The walls are covered with choice engravings, and paintings by the artist-daughter. She really is an artist.<sup>1</sup>

"Some people," Maria Child confided to Mrs. Shaw, "complain that the Alcott family is brusque." She explained, however, that "it is merely because they are straight forward and sincere." They had suffered as had Mrs. Child from inquisitive people, who intruded on the private life of noted people. "I like L. and her artist sister, M. very much... They have a Christian hatred of lionizing; and the Leo Hunters are a very numerous and impertinent family."<sup>2</sup> Throughout her literary career she disliked the idea of imposing on the busy time of famous people. In 1848 she wrote to her brother:

I have found it to hold good, as a general rule, that a person who will ask for a letter of introduction is sure to be a bore. If I were going to Europe, and letters of introduction to Wordsworth, Dickens, etc., were offered me, I would never present them, unless I happened by some accident to receive indications of a wish to be introduced, on the part of the men

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 230

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 230

themselves. What right have I to intrude upon their time, and satisfy my impertinent curiosity by an inventory of their furniture and surroundings? Dignify it as they may, by talk about reverence for genius, loving a man for his writings, etc., I have always believed it a game of vanity, both with those who offer it, and those who are pleased with it.<sup>1</sup>

Over thirty years later, time had not mellowed Mrs. Child's feelings on this subject.

That Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ is the plague of my life. It is the fourth or fifth time she has been 'pervading my department, wanting to know.' I don't remember when the Juvenile Miscellany began, and what sort of interest can it have for the public? An impertinent reporter of the \_\_\_\_\_ interviewed me, and in that paper last June informed the public of the figures in my carpet and the color of my gown, to which he appended some literary dates. Few things 'rile me up' like this impertinent curiosity, which, after all, is only a fashionable way of earning a penny without work. There is nothing in my personal history either 'new, useful, or entertaining.'<sup>2</sup>

During 1848 Miss Osgood died and left two thousand dollars for the colored people and appointed her trusted friend, Maria Child, as trustee. One thousand dollars went to a home for colored women; the remainder was used to found the "Osgood Scholarship" at Hampton College in Virginia. The first scholar was a young man from Georgia who had been working very industriously to earn money to attend the college. He had placed three hundred dollars in the Freedman's Bank, and lost it all by the dishonesty of the managers. His independence in writing, "Don't beg for me at the North, my good friend. I will go to work, and try again. I want to row my own boat," so touched Mrs. Child that she wrote to General Armstrong to consider him as the first candidate for the scholarship. She was most happy when he

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 69

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 256

was successful. In writing of this happy experience, she added wistfully, "I have so often been unsuccessful in my efforts to help others."<sup>1</sup>

Although there were failures among the many attempts Mrs. Child made to aid her fellows, in her association with friends she was most fortunate.

Many of her friendships with the great of her time were in a measure a tribute to her reputation as a writer and leader of the abolitionist movement. Some of her friends were, however, more personal and most dear to her. Among this group was Mrs. Sarah Shaw. She was the only person other than members of her own family to whom Maria Child wrote with emotion. Addressing her fondly as "My precious Sarah," and signing herself with the sobriquet, "Marguiata," Maria Child writes of the daily joys and sorrows which were her life.

In 1859 Maria Child cordially offered her limited hospitality to her dear friend. She wrote from Wayland:

I would gladly come to meet you, to save you trouble; but for no other reason. As for turning us out of our chamber, we transfer only our bodies; and should you consider that any great trouble, for the sight of a precious friend? Moreover, suppose it was any trouble, be it known to you that I would turn myself out of my house, and live in a tree, any time for you. Please put quite out of your head all idea that your coming will give me trouble. In the first place, I will promise not to take trouble. In the next place, I would inform you that the world is divided into two classes; those who love to minister to others, and those who like to be ministered unto. I think I belong to the first class. I also belong to the class described in Counterparts as those to whom it is more necessary to love than to be beloved; though both are essential to my happiness. Bad, isn't it? for a childless woman of sixty years. But then, my good David serves me for husband and baby and all.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, p. 140

The occasion of the death of Colonel Shaw brought forth from Maria Child a letter of sympathy in which submission to the Divine Will is at variance with a personal sorrow almost too deep for words. With anguish of spirit she wrote to Mrs. Shaw on July 25, 1863:

Oh, darling! if the newspaper rumor be true, what I have so long dreaded has come upon you. But rumor very often exaggerates, and sometimes invents, so I still hope, though with a heart that bleeds for you. If the report be true, may our Heavenly Father sustain you under this heavy sorrow. Severe as the blow must be, it is not altogether without consolations. If your beautiful and brave boy has died, he died nobly in defense of great principles, and has gone to join the glorious martyrs; and how much more sacred and dear to memory is such a life and such a death, than a life spent in self-indulgence, gradually impairing the health, and weakening the mental powers. Your darling Robert made the most of the powers and advantages God had given him, by consecrating them to the defense of freedom and humanity. Such a son in the spirit world is worth ten living here for themselves only. Besides, dear, the separation is only for a little while. You parted from him a young man, but rendered thoughtful and anxious beyond his years, by reason of the heavy responsibility that developed upon him. You will meet him a serene angel, endowed with larger vision, and better understanding why it is that we are doomed to suffer here. Ah, darling, my words fall coldly upon your bereaved heart. God comfort you! He alone can carry you through this dark passage. He has given you beautiful little grandchildren to love, and I trust their soft arms will help to bear you up. Most sincerely do I wish that my old life could have been sacrificed to save your brave and beautiful boy. But the heavenly Father ordereth all things in wisdom, and in mercy too; as we should acknowledge; if we could only see the end from the beginning.<sup>1</sup>

In order to console Mrs. Shaw in the dark days of her sorrow, Maria Child quoted from a letter which she had received from Whittier, in which he pays tribute to Colonel Shaw:

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library

I know of nothing nobler or grander than the heroic self-sacrifice of young Colonel Shaw. The only regiment I ever looked upon during the war was the 54th, on its departure for the South. I shall never forget the scene. As he rode at the head of his troops, the very flower of grace and chivalry, he seemed to me beautiful and awful as an Angel of God come down to lead the host of freedom to victory... For his parents I feel that reverence which belongs to the highest manifestation of devotion to duty and forgetfulness of self, in view of the mighty interest of humanity. There must be a noble pride in their great sorrow. I am sure they would not exchange their dead son for any living one.<sup>1</sup>

So close was the friendship of Maria Child and Mrs. Shaw that it was to the latter that Thomas Higginson appealed to secure Maria Child's consent that he write her biography. As usual, when she felt her personal privacy was being invaded, Maria Child was indignant. She wrote to Mrs. Shaw:

With regard to Mr. Higginson I am desirous to oblige him, from motives of personal respect; but the idea of laying open my private letters for such a purpose is excessively painful to me. It is perfectly horrid to think of having the public informed of expressions uttered in a childish abandon of familiar friendship. I don't think anybody has a right to make a biography of a person who does not wish to have it done. It puts me in a real fret. I detest notoriety. There are plenty of people who like it. Let him blow the trumpet for them. This mousing round after my private sentiment seems to me like surgeons politely asking me to be dissected before I am dead. You think I am cross. Well, I am. It always makes me cross to have the public 'pervading my department, wanting to know.'<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps she had in mind the freedom with which she had written to Mrs. Shaw about public figures. It was indeed to a familiar friend and not for publication that she wrote to Mrs. Shaw in 1856 about Nathaniel P. Willis:

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Letters, p. 240

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library

I smiled to read that he had warmed up to N. P. W. to such a degree that he announced his intention to deposit his 'virgin vote' for Fremont. It was pleasant to learn that he had anything 'virgin' left to swear by. What a Rip! to lie sleeping fifty years, dreaming of kid gloves, embroidered vests, and perfumed handkerchiefs, taking it for granted that his country was all the while going forward in a righteous and glorious career. Isn't it too bad that such parasol-holders should have the right to vote, while earnest souls like you and me must wait the result in agonizing inaction? Things look squally, don't they, dear? But while there is life, there is hope.

While Maria Child admired Ralph Waldo Emerson, she was independent in her thinking concerning his writings. In 1844 she wrote that Emerson had sent her his new volume, which by the date must have been the Essays, Second Series.<sup>2</sup> Of the volume, she noted, "As usual, it is full of deep and original sayings, and touches of exceeding beauty. But as usual it takes away my strength."<sup>3</sup> For one who was so deeply engrossed in what she believed to be the salvation of her country, Emerson's writings were too unreal and his aversion to movements of any kind was too profound for her to read him with a sympathetic mind.

She was, however, sufficiently interested in the man to pass on the gossip of his second marriage. "Mr. Emerson is about to marry a Swedenborgian lady, who, the first time she heard him lecture, received a very strong impression that they were spiritual partners; inasmuch that, on her return home she said to a friend, 'That man is certainly my pre-destined husband.'"<sup>4</sup>

Henry W. Longfellow showed his admiration for the writings of Maria Child by adapting her "pleasant and winsome" Quaker story of "The Youthful

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 35

<sup>2</sup>Emerson published his Essays, Second Series in 1844

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 56

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 44

Emigrant" into "The Theologian's Tale." Professor Daniel Treadwell, "a physicist of genius who had also a turn for theology," in whose name the tale is told, contradicts the student's criticism that the story is:

. . . . . somewhat pale  
 And quiet in its coloring,  
 As if it caught its tone and air  
 From the gray suits that Quakers wear;  
 Yet worthy of some German bard,  
 Hebel, or Voss, or Eberhard,  
 Who love of human themes to sing,  
 In humble verse; but no more true  
 Than was the tale I told to you.

The author then makes the explanation:

. . . . . That I deny;  
 'Tis no invention of my own,  
 But something well and widely known  
 To readers of a riper age,  
 Writ by the skilful hand that wrote  
 The Indian tale of Hobomok  
 And Philothea's classic page.  
 I found it like a waif afloat,  
 Or dulse uprooted from its rock,  
 On the swift tides that ebb and flow  
 In daily papers, and at flood  
 Bear freighted vessels to and fro,  
 But later, when the ebb is low,  
 Leave a long waste of sand and mud.<sup>1</sup>

Another major figure of the genteel tradition of New England paid tribute to Maria Child as a writer. James Russell Lowell's tribute to her in the Fable for Critics, published in 1848, remains among the most accurate and just estimates of her character and literary ability.

It was, however, with another poet of this period that she early established a personal friendship. With John Greenleaf Whittier she was in

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<sup>1</sup> Longfellow, op. cit., p. 312

complete mental accord. Although a pacifist of the best Quaker type, Whittier, inspired by an early contact with William Lloyd Garrison, joined the anti-slavery ranks. He made his formal avowal of the principles of abolition in 1833 with the publication of his personal tribute to William Lloyd Garrison that "Champion of those who groan beneath Oppression's iron hand." Whittier's continued support of the Abolition Movement led him to turn on his own cousin, Daniel Webster, when the latter spoke in defense of the "Compromise" and the Fugitive Slave Law. While today it is realized that Webster's willingness to compromise was based on his intense desire to preserve the Union, the bitterness of Whittier's "Ichabod" indicates the contemporary feeling aroused by the speech among the opponents of slavery. Maria Child, one of the most outspoken critics of Webster, never changed her opinion of his cupidity. Although Whittier was to relent and publish a more favorable opinion in "The Lost Occasion," Maria Child remained bitter even after the struggle was over and the anti-slavery forces had won their victory. Writing to Mrs. Shaw her pleasure that a statue was to be erected in memory of the valiant Col. Shaw, Maria Child added, "I hope they will not place it in the vicinity of Daniel Webster. If Webster had done his duty, there would have been no storming at Fort Wagner."<sup>1</sup>

Thus joined in the intensity of their anti-slavery feeling there were also a personal kinship between the Quaker and "Philothea." It is rare indeed that Maria Child strove to explain her actions or apologized

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 189



for a possible breach of friendship, yet to this "Dear and Honored Friend," she wrote:

A few months ago, I wrote you a long and earnest letter; and it has made me sad to receive no response. The idea that you do not think kindly of me is very painful; for there are few in this world whose good opinion I should so highly prize. If you think I have pursued a wrong course, with regard to Anti-Slavery, or anything else, tell me so, with the frankness of a brother. If I have personally hurt your feelings, forgive me.<sup>1</sup>

In June of 1853 Maria Child wrote to "Friend Whittier,"

I brought with me, to my humble little nest, a pleasant memory of our brief interview, as one brings the fragrance of a flower that withers on the heart. To those who write simply, from their inmost life, it often happens that thousands are hungry to see them, of whose affection they never dream. I have had a great longing to meet you in person, as I am often meeting you in spirit, and always with renewed and ever-increasing pleasure. I was so glad to look into your eyes once more! to feel again the cordial pressure of your hand! How it brought back those early Anti-Slavery days! those noble self forgetting days! when love of our fellow-men was the basis of all our ethics, and willing obedience to the God of love was the broad basis of our creed! You and I and many another soul owed much of growth to the enobling and strengthening influences of those days. Let us be thankful for all we have gained for our own soul, and for the little we have been enabled to do for the souls of others. Let us forget the disappointment of cherished hopes and expectations, or remember them only with full faith that He who in wisdom ruleth all things, will educe from them also some beneficial result.<sup>2</sup>

In 1860 Maria Child recorded another of her visits to Whittier:

Friend Whittier and his gentle Quakerly sister seemed delighted to see me, or rather, he seemed delighted and she seemed pleased. There was a Republican meeting that evening, at which he felt obliged to show himself; but he came back before long, having indiscreetly excused himself by stating that I was at his house. The result was, that a posse of Republicans came, after the meeting was over, to look at the woman who 'fired hot shot at

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

Governor Wise,' in the interim, however, I had some cosy chat with Friend Whittier, and it was right pleasant going over our anti-slavery reminiscences. Oh, those were glorious times! working shoulder to shoulder, in such a glow of faith!

Whittier made piteous complaints of time wasted and strength exhausted by the numerous loafers who came to see him out of mere curiosity, or to put up with him to save a penny. I was amused to hear his sister describe some of these interruptions in her slow, Quakerly fashion... 'The women are more pertinacious than the men; don't thee find them so, Maria?' I told him I did. 'How does thee manage to get time to do anything?' said he. I told him I took care to live away from the railroad, and kept a bull dog and a pitch-fork, and advised him to do the same.<sup>1</sup>

Agreeing to visit Marjorie Curson in 1860, Maria Child wrote to her that whenever she visited it would be for only two days; one of which she should like "to spend with Whittier." She further requested that Miss Curson or her sister make her "a little sketch of Whittier's house," which she wanted merely as a memento of one of the best benefactors of my soul."<sup>2</sup>

As in all her enthusiasms, David Child joined his wife in her affection for Whittier. Mrs. Child wrote their joint praise in a letter on January 21, 1862:

What a glorious, blessed gift is this gift of song, with which you are so lavishly endowed! Who can calculate its influence, which you exert always for good! My David, who always rejoices over your writings, was especially pleased with the 'Boat Song,' which he prophesies will be sung ere long by thousands of darkies. He bids me say to you that

One bugle note from Whittier's pen<sup>3</sup>  
Is worth at least ten thousand men.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 141

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

<sup>3</sup>Letters, p. 160

In answer to a letter, which she refers to as "Whittier's love letter,"<sup>1</sup> Maria Child regrets that they are not "within walking distance of each other," and tells Whittier that on looking at a likeness of him, he comes distinctly before her as she first knew him when she concludes, "your eyes seemed glowing with the sacred fire with which your verses kindled all our hearts."<sup>2</sup>

Whittier was aware of the great sacrifices Mrs. Child made to the cause of freedom and emancipation. He himself from the more ample means of his later years gave generously for the betterment of the slave and later the freedmen. Following the example of his friend who sacrificed even common comforts to further the cause in which they ardently believed, Whittier made large contributions to General Armstrong's enterprise for the instruction of Negroes and Indians at Hampton, Virginia. He expressed his appreciation of the sacrifices she had made with full understanding of the consequences and an equal indifference to them. Of all the members of that intrepid group, who early avowed the unpopular cause of the slave, it was his opinion that Maria Child "had made the costliest offering to the cause."<sup>3</sup> He wrote:

Some had little to sacrifice... These alone of all of us, had won literary reputation which any one might have been proud of... Why, my friend, they reputation, in spite of the anti-slavery surrender of it for so many years, is still a living and beautiful reality. And, after all, good as they books are, we know thee to be better than any book. I wish thee could know how proudly and tenderly thee is loved and honored by the best and wisest in the land.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Library of Congress

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Letters, p. 30

<sup>4</sup>Letters, p. 90

One of Whittier's enjoyments in later years was recalling his memories of his early friend, Maria Child, whose experience of life had so much in common with his own; and in serving her memory by editing a volume of her letters after her death. It was as a sincere friend that this service was performed and as a kindred soul he wrote a poetic tribute entitled "Within the Gate." While less well-known than Lowell's tribute, Whittier's lines express the earnest personal kindness with which he regarded Maria Child. The closing stanzas describe her activities:

Did we not witness in the life of thee  
Immortal prophecy?  
And feel, when with thee, that thy footsteps tread  
An everlasting road?

Not for brief days thy generous sympathies,  
Thy scorn of selfish ease;  
Not for the poor prize of an earthly goal  
Thy strong uplift of soul.

Than thine was never turned a fonder heart  
To nature and to art,  
In fair-formed Hellas in her golden prime,  
Thy Philothea's time.

Yet, loving beauty, thou couldst pass it by,  
And for the poor deny  
Thyself, and see thy fresh, sweet flow of fame  
Wither in blight and blame.

Sharing His love who holds in His embrace  
The lowliest of our race,  
Sure the Divine economy must be  
Conservative of thee!

For truth must live with truth, self-sacrifice  
Seek out its great allies;  
Good must find good by gravitation sure,  
And love with love endure.

And so, since thou hast passed within the gate  
Whereby awhile I wait,  
I give blind grief and blinder sense the lie;  
Thou hast not lived to die!

Thus did her friends love Maria Child despite her outspoken nature and her peculiar, almost solitary, habits. The literary world of her day paid tribute to her, and many who first admired her writings and opinions became her friends.

One of Maria Child's more interesting friendships was that with Mrs. Marianna Silsbee, whose husband, Nathaniel, was of those Salem families whose sons were shipmasters when still in their teens. At nineteen Nathaniel Silsbee, a matured mariner, commanded the Benjamin and began his great fortune.<sup>1</sup> Retiring from the sea at twenty-nine, he later became United States Senator from Massachusetts. The correspondence between Maria Child and Mrs. Silsbee was voluminous, and extended over a long period of time. Maria Child had no false modesty about asking her friends to contribute financial aid to her various projects. Determinedly independent for herself, she solicited aid freely for her proteges. Mrs. Silsbee was asked to purchase for ten dollars a "gold embroidered Marie Stuart headdress," which had been made by Dolores, a Spanish protegee of Maria Child. This would seem a natural request to make of a wealthy friend, but the letter which requests that Mrs. Silsbee purchase the article is unusual.

I am going to reverse the usual order of things. Instead of doing something for you on your birthday, I want you to do something for me. Do you remember my little Spanish protegee, Dolores? In the gratitude of her affectionate heart, she embroidered with gold a Marie Stuart head-dress of crimson velvet,

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph D. Paine, The Old Merchant Marine, p. 60

and gave it to me. It is not suited to my insignificant person and forlorn condition; but it is just the thing for you. My heart prompts me to send it to you as a present; but you do not need assistance, and my poor Dolores does. Therefore, I propose that you buy it, if you feel so inclined. I should not make such a proposal if the head-dress were not really very stylish and elegant. It had never been worn, or seen by any one but ourselves in Third Street. I do not believe you could find anything as stylish in Boston. Lawson would charge at least fifteen dollars for it. I offer it to you for ten.<sup>1</sup>

Here is indeed a peculiar attitude toward gift-giving, but one which Mrs. Silsbee seemed to consider acceptable, for the money was sent and the head-dress "carefully packed" and forwarded to her.

Three friends are discussed in the letters to Mrs. Silsbee. One was a former friend, Catherine Sedgwick. Maria Child had been, in her earlier years, a close friend of the Sedgwick family. Of this association she wrote:

In earlier years Catherine Sedgwick was a cordial friend to me. I then had many pleasant talks and friendly letters from her; and since my residence in New York we have occasionally had agreeable interviews. Her wordly and genteel relations fetter somewhat the freedom of her gentle spirit; but she is a most admirable woman; and I cherish heartfelt respect and affection for her.<sup>2</sup>

The ties formed by a girlhood friendship with Margaret Fuller were sufficiently strong in adult life that Mrs. Child was willing to have her home used as a rendezvous by Margaret Fuller during her tempestuous romance with James Nathan. It was then perhaps not envy, although to go abroad was the thwarted ambition of Maria Child's life, but rather an incensed New England frugality which caused her to write, "Margaret Fuller, it seems, is so much in love with Italy, that she will not return until she has expended her last dollar."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

A third friend discussed in these letters is the celebrated Ole Bull. Maria Child loved music, of that there can be no doubt. Equally certain is her admiration for Ole Bull and his undeniable genius with the violin. In her Letters from New York Mrs. Child wrote a "wreath of wild-flowers" to Ole Bull. Opening with the lines:

Welcome to thee, Ole Bull!  
A welcome, warm and free!  
For heart and memory are full  
Of thy rich minstrelsy.

Each successive verse offers eulogistic praise, and concludes:

Of beauty she is lavish ever;  
Her urn is always full;  
But to our earth she giveth never  
Another Ole Bull.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far the association is in keeping with the admiration of a music lover for a master, but in her letters to Mrs. Silsbee Maria Child, at the age of forty-five, writes as would a frustrated school girl. Writing of her pleasure in his visits and her joy in having him "come up to compose some music" in her "still little parlor," she later bemoans his absence and neglect.

I have written to him many pleasant things since he 'did go away,' but he has never returned one syllable of answer. He has not sent us anything. I am sorry he thus repels our sincere, disinterested, devoted friendship. It would have been a great comfort to us to have kept up an occasional intercourse by writing; and we expected so very little from him, that it seems somewhat hard to be disappointed in that little. I thank you for your offer to send to Paris; but I shall never again remind Ole of my existence, in any way, unless he himself requests it. I do not care to read French criticism. ...They cannot appreciate the spontaneous gushings of a soul like Ole... Your experience in one respect has been similar to mine. I too had been long laboring under discouragement and severe depression, when I first heard Ole. He gave a fresh impulse to my soul,

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<sup>1</sup> Lydia M. Child, Letters from New York, Second Series, p. 233

kindled in me a new life, made a bright Indian Summer in the dreary autumn of my existence. Strange, very strange, has been, and is, his power over me. He has so pained me by his indifference and total neglect, that I wish I had never heard of him. Yet other friends who treat me with lavish kindness, whose character are more in unison with my own, and whose qualities are more worthy of my entire approbation, are not cherished in my memory as tenderly as he is. Ole claims ever the privileges of a little child, in whom one must forgive much, on account of winning ways, and not meaning any harm.<sup>1</sup>

Many letters are included in this collection expressing thanks for books and various gifts. With perfect frankness Mrs. Child tells of returning books to the bookseller, and requesting that "credit be given" the donor. One book in particular fascinated her, and in writing of it she expressed herself with that complete lack of guile which marked all her letters, and which in her more conservative moments may have made her dread publications of these confessions:

I have read Jane Eyre. I was perfectly carried away with it ... sat up all night to finish it... I do not agree with the critics who pronounced Rochester unlovable. I could have loved him with my whole heart. His very imperfections brought him more within the range of warm human sympathy. Ought Jane to have left him at that dreadful crisis? She was all alone in the world, and could do no harm to mother, sister, child or friend by taking her freedom. The tyrannical law which bound him to a mad and wicked wife, seems such a mere figment! I liked Rochester all the better for impetuous feeling and passion which carried him away; but I want conscience to come and check him, like a fiery horse reined in at full gallop. At the last moment, when they were ready to go to church to be married, I wish he had thrown himself on her generosity, I wish he had said, 'Jane, I cannot deceive you' and told her the painful story he afterward revealed. There might have been the same struggle, and the same result; and it would have shown the nobleness of Rochester's love for Jane... I am glad the book represents Jane as refusing to trust him; for in the present disorderly state of the world, it would not be well for public morals to represent it otherwise. But my private opinion is that a real living Jane Eyre, placed in similar circumstances, would have obeyed an inward law, higher and better than an outward conventional scruples.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Thus she reveals to an intimate friend the fact that in her private opinion love is vastly more important than the conventions which she stoutly defends in her public utterances.

In books were found a companionship more vital and interesting than the human contacts which she deliberately declined. Just three years before her death she wrote, "I like some human beings better than books but not many. Books have one very great advantage over people; you can put them aside whenever you don't care to be with them any longer. Moreover, I can make up a contemptuous mouth and say, 'Pshaw! all bosh!' when a book says what I don't like, but it won't do to treat people with so much freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Physically Maria Child was small, and late in life became quite stout. She frankly confessed that she never at any period in her life possessed any physical beauty, a fact to which she attributed the circumstances that anyone possessing personal beauty could "make a pack horse" of her.

Whether at home or abroad, she was plainly dressed. They may have been through some slight oddity or eccentricity, and a reluctance to appear extravagant. She was especially peculiar in what she wore on her head... It is said that one of her distinguished literary friends, when he saw her one day in Boston with a new bonnet, exclaimed, 'There will be a change soon, for Maria has got a new bonnet!' A minister, who was spending the day at Wayland, seeing her go by, and not knowing who she was, exclaimed, 'I have seen what I never expected to see again, - a woman with a bonnet on!' Her bonnets were large, and green was the color that usually predominated; and at one time, when New York friends sent her one, she trimmed it over to suit her own taste.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, p. 256

<sup>2</sup> Hudson, op. cit., p. 412

Edgar Allan Poe wrote of her:

Mrs. Child casually observed, has nothing particularly striking in her personal appearance. One would pass her in the street a dozen times without notice. She is low in stature and slight framed. Her complexion is florid; eyes and hair are dark; features in general diminutive. The expression of her countenance, when animated, is highly intellectual. Her dress is usually plain, not even neat - anything but fashionable.<sup>1</sup>

Her manner of living during the later years of her life must have been most trying. Independent by nature, the restrictions of age were most unpleasant to her. Her position was very peculiar. A Mrs. Pickering, her housekeeper companion, by her very gentility, presented a problem. In 1879, explaining why she was unable to entertain her "Dearly Beloved Friend," Mrs. Shaw, Mrs. Child wrote:

I am in a queer sort of position here. Mrs. Pickering is uncommonly kind, conscientious, and capable; but she has some peculiarities, to which she clings with wonderful obstinacy. She has laid it down, as an inflexible rule, that she will not receive any company, either for herself or for me. It is an extreme case of the American price of gentility. Summer before last, and last summer, I tried to coax her to let me have Mrs. Russell and Mrs. Sewall. I offered every pecuniary inducement, and every argument I could think of. Her answer was, that I could have as much company as I liked; but that she should always go away to her sister's; for which she had to ride thirty miles, walk a mile and a half, and then back again. I laid your proposition before her, with the same result. But an Irish woman, who sometimes washes to me, says she will come and boil the tea kettle; so I should be able to furnish you with tea and bread and butter without leaving you all the time. I need not say that my heart gives you a warm welcome. This peculiarity of my companion tries my patience not a little. But she has many excellent qualities, we have been long acquainted, and I believe she is sincerely attached to me. The old are obliged to give up their freedom; in a great measure. The world is not all before them, where to choose, as it is with the young. They must take what they can get, and strive to be content.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, Literati, p. 100

<sup>2</sup>Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library, Wayland, Massachusetts

The loss of her husband deprived Mrs. Child of her great joy in her home. This letter continues:

My old nest here is not in as good condition as formerly. Situated just as I am, I have not felt much heart to 'fix up' as I used to do. I sadly feel the want of dear David's help in out-door affairs. Then, I have never felt settled since he died. I have always been in hopes that some situation more eligible for me, would open. I know it is unwise, as well as unpleasant, to remain in such an extremely isolated position. But circumstances prove too strong for me.<sup>1</sup>

Periods of depression oppressed her during the later years of her life. So low spirited was she that she removed to Dover Street in Boston, and even then was too unhappy to answer the letters of her closest friends.

Even to her "Darling Friend," Mrs. Shaw, she apologized:

I know, darling, that there has been a long silence between us. I have thought of it again and again, with a twinge of remorse; for I was ashamed of the reason. The fact is, I have been unusually low spirited this summer, and I did not want to write dismally. It goes very hard with me to give up my little nest in Wayland, without being able to think of any other shelter, that should seem at all like home. But such anxiety about the future is very foolish; for, think as much as we may, we cannot shape our destiny... I am inexpressibly weary. There seems to be such a vast amount of wrong in the world, and one individual can do so little. I keep working, because I am quite sure that no particle of goodness or truth is ever really lost, however appearance may be to the contrary. But in trying to help others, it is sometimes difficult to decide what is good. I have several poor souls in tow, trying to guide them into comfort through righteous paths. But I make them so dependent, that I sometimes fear I do them harm, rather than good. Yet, what is to be done? They are so ignorant and weak-minded, they cannot rely upon themselves.<sup>2</sup>

These were not the words of the independent, self-reliant Maria Child. These are the words of a tired and aging woman, living a life "whose

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

bitterest portion is a widowed heart."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Child knew dependency and loneliness for the first time in life and found it difficult to adjust to the new circumstances.

Solitary throughout life Mrs. Child became more and more reluctant to mix with her fellowmen as she grew older. Her attitude is best shown by a letter regretfully refusing an invitation:

I am sorry you invited me for this evening; for it pains me to refuse your kind offer... But as I have already refused invitations urged upon me with great kindness, I could not easily accept yours without giving the lie to my protestations that I accept no invitations, and literally visited nowhere.

It is my desire to live a life of complete seclusion, with the exception of a few friends, who agree never to invite me, and to call to see me only when the spirit moves them.

I know by experience how difficult it is to make a beginning in these things, without having the circle widen, till one finds oneself in that horrid whirlpool called Society.

Believe me, nevertheless, sincerely<sup>2</sup> grateful for your kind attention, and truly sorry to refuse.

Mrs. Child humorously explained the situation to her dear life-long friend, Mrs. Sarah Shaw, "There have been many attempts to saddle and bridle me, and teach me to keep step in respectable processions; but they have never got the lasso over my neck yet, and 'old horse' as I am now, if I see the lasso in the air, I snort and gallop off, determined to be a free horse to the last, and put up with the consequent lack of grooming and stabling."<sup>3</sup>

To the last years of her life Mrs. Child was interested in psychic phenomenon. She shared with William Garrison a believe in Spiritualism.

<sup>1</sup> Lydia M. Child, Biographies of Good Wives, p. 53

<sup>2</sup> Manuscript Letter, Dartmouth College

<sup>3</sup> Letters, p. 230

Her belief, however, extended only to a "glimpse," for beyond this she felt all was "precarious and unreliable." It was perhaps her intense desire to communicate with her departed husband that made her so ardently desire to believe.

My conviction remains unchanged that those who leave this world do live in another state of conscious, individual existence; and that, under given circumstances, they can communicate with souls in this world; though in a very imperfect way. How can communication be perfect, or easy, when the laws that govern the two planes of existence must be as different as the condition of fishes and birds? This renders a satisfactory investigation of the subject almost impossible; even without taking into consideration the immense amount of trickery and self-delusion.<sup>1</sup>

She preached the essential faith necessary to such a belief. To

Miss Lucy Searle she wrote:

Since I saw you, I have often thought of the fear you seem to have of Spiritualism. You appeared to regard it as something uncanny. I cannot feel so about it. I don't believe there is any miracle or any devilry about it. I simply believe that the union of our spritual nature with our material is governed by laws which we do not understand, and which lie beyond the region of any tests we are as yet able to apply. I don't think the devil has anything to do with Spritualism, any more than he has with comets. I rather think I don't believe in the devil. I certainly never think of him in connection with any mysteries that interest me... Now there is electricity. It is an everlasting puzzle to me.<sup>2</sup>

Animal magnetism, phrenology, mesmerism and spirit rappings, so popular in her day, were of great interest to her. These interests were not due to any peculiarity on the part of Mrs. Child but rather a highly developed intellectual curiosity. When the meagre education which Mrs. Child had is considered, it must be realized that with real educational opportunities, her remarkable ability would have shown itself in true perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library

<sup>2</sup> Letters, p. 167

Having lost all those she loved, Mrs. Child faced death with equanimity. In 1879 she explained, "it is easier for one who has no ties to drop out of the world."<sup>1</sup> Active to the last, Mrs. Child wrote on February 14, 1879, "The only strong wish I have is to retain my faculties to the last, and slip away quietly out of this world, so as not to make anybody much trouble."<sup>2</sup> She had planned all the arrangements for her simple funeral, refusing to be buried in the Mount Auburn cemetery, for "it would be too near the Boston aristocracy."<sup>3</sup> Her final illness was short, and the day before she died she was up and dressed. On October 20, 1880 Lydia Maria Child died, "recognized as one of the most able women of her generation."<sup>4</sup> In accordance with her request, the funeral was without display. The service was at the house, the officiating minister was a village clergyman, and the pall-bearers were plain fellow-townsmen. After the clergyman's remarks, Wendell Phillips pronounced an appropriate eulogy.

Thus simply and without pomp was buried one of America's earliest humanitarians. Laid at rest in a quiet and secluded Wayland cemetery, within which lie the bodies of members of that enslaved race to whom much of her life was dedicated, her grave is marked by a simple headstone inscribed:

Lydia Maria Child  
Born February 11, 1802  
Died October 20, 1880  
You call us dead  
We are not dead  
We are truly living now.

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<sup>1</sup>Manuscript Letter, Wayland Public Library, Wayland, Massachusetts

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Higginson, Contemporaries, p. 413

<sup>4</sup>Cowie, op. cit., p. 182

It remained for her dear friend Whittier to write the final tribute to Mrs. Child. Out of his grief at her death, he wrote, "The true, noble, loving soul! Where is she? What is she? How is she? The moral and spiritual economy of God will not suffer such light and love to be lost in blank annihilation. She was herself an evidence of immortality..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Mrs. James T. Fields, Whittier, Notes of his Life and his Friendships, pp. 16-17

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